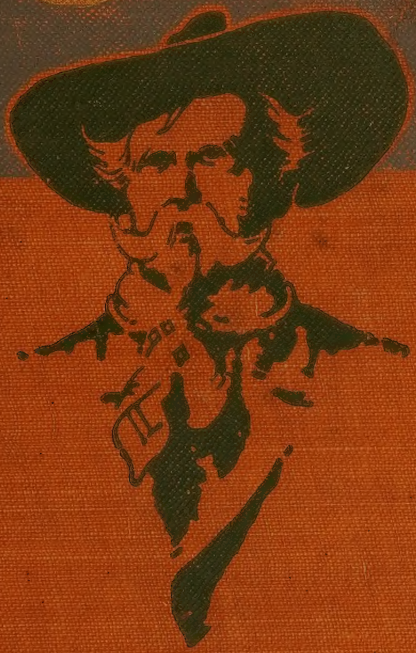
The KING of ARCADIA



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THE KING OF ARCADIA

"You must help me," she pleaded; "I cannot see the way a single step ahead"

THE KING OF ARCADIA

BY

FRANCIS LYNDE

Author of "A Romance in Transit," "The Quickening," etc.

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Accession 193

ILLUSTRATED

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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Published February, 1909

To my daughter Dorothea,

AMANUENSIS OF THE
LOVING HEART AND WILLING HANDS
IN ITS WRITING,
THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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THE KING OF ARCADIA

The King of Arcadia

I

THE CRYPTOGRAM

THE strenuous rush of the day of suddenly changed plans was over, and with Gardiner, the assistant professor of geology, to bid him Godspeed, Ballard had got as far as the track platform gates of the Boston & Albany Station when Lassley's telegram, like a detaining hand stretched forth out of the invisible, brought him to a stand.

He read it, with a little frown of perplexity sobering his strong, enthusiastic face.

"*S.S. Carania*, NEW YORK.

"*To* BRECKENRIDGE BALLARD, *Boston.*

"You love life and crave success. Arcadia Irrigation has killed its originator and two chiefs of construction. It will kill you. Let it alone.

"LASSLEY."

He signed the book, tipped the boy for his successful chase, and passed the telegram on to Gardiner.

"If you were called in as an expert, what would you make of that?" he asked.

The assistant professor adjusted his eye-glasses, read the message, and returned it without suggestive comment.

"My field being altogether prosaic, I should make nothing of it. There are no assassinations in geology. What does it mean?"

Ballard shook his head.

"I haven't the remotest idea. I wired Lassley this morning telling him that I had thrown up the Cuban sugar mills construction to accept the chief engineer's billet on Arcadia Irrigation. I didn't suppose he had ever heard of Arcadia before my naming of it to him."

"I thought the Lassleys were in Europe," said Gardiner.

"They are sailing to-day in the *Carania*, from New York. My wire was to wish them a safe voyage, and to give my prospective address. That explains the date-line of this telegram."

"But it does not explain the warning. Is it true that the Colorado irrigation scheme has blotted out three of its field officers?"

"Oh, an imaginative person might put it that way, I suppose," said Ballard, his tone asserting that none but an imaginative person would be so foolish. "Braithwaite, of the Geodetic Survey, was

the originator of the plan for constructing a storage reservoir in the upper Boiling Water basin, and for transforming Arcadia Park into an irrigated agricultural district. He interested Mr. Pelham and a few other Denver capitalists, and they sent him out as chief engineer to stand the project on its feet. Shortly after he had laid the foundations for the reservoir dam, he fell into the Boiling Water and was drowned."

Gardiner's humour was as dry as his professional specialty. "One," he said, checking off the unfortunate Braithwaite on his fingers.

"Then Billy Sanderson took it—you remember Billy, in my year? He made the preliminary survey for an inlet railroad over the mountains, and put a few more stones on Braithwaite's dam. As they say out on the Western edge of things, Sanderson died with his boots on; got into trouble with somebody about a camp-following woman and was shot."

"Two," checked the assistant in geology. "Who was the third?"

"An elderly, dyspeptic Scotchman named Macpherson. He took up the work where Sanderson dropped it; built the railroad over the mountain and through Arcadia Park to the headquarters at the dam, and lived to see the dam itself something more than half completed."

"And what happened to Mr. Macpherson?" queried Gardiner.

"He was killed a few weeks ago. The derrick fell on him. The accident provoked a warm discussion in the technical periodicals. A wire guy cable parted—'rusted off,' the newspaper report said—and there was a howl from the wire-rope makers, who protested that a rope made of galvanised wire couldn't possibly 'rust off.'"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Macpherson was successfully killed," remarked the professor dryly. "That would seem to be the persisting fact in the discussion. Does none of these things move you?"

"Certainly not," returned the younger man. "I shall neither fall into the river, nor stand under a derrick whose guy lines are unsafe."

Gardiner's smile was a mere eye wrinkle of good-natured cynicism. "You carefully omit poor Sanderson's fate. One swims out of a torrent—if he can—and an active young fellow might possibly be able to dodge a falling derrick. But who can escape the toils of the woman 'whose hands are as bands, and whose feet——'"

"Oh, piff!" said the Kentuckian; and then he laughed aloud. "There is, indeed, one woman in the world, my dear *Herr* Professor, for whose sake I would joyfully stand up and be shot at; but she isn't in Colorado, by a good many hundred miles."

"No? Nevertheless, Breckenridge, my son, there lies your best chance of making the fourth in the list of sacrifices. You are a Kentuckian; an ardent and chivalric Southerner. If the Fates really wish to interpose in contravention of the Arcadian scheme, they will once more bait the deadfall with the eternal feminine—always presuming, of course, that there are any Fates, and that they have ordinary intelligence."

Ballard shook his head as if he took the prophecy seriously.

"I am in no danger on that score. Bromley — he was Sanderson's assistant, and afterward Macpherson's, you know—wrote me that the Scotchman's first general order was an edict banishing every woman from the construction camps."

"Now, if he had only banished the derricks at the same time," commented Gardiner reflectively. Then he added: "You may be sure the Fates will find you an enchantress, Breckenridge; the oracles have spoken. What would the most peerless Arcadia be without its shepherdess? But we are jesting when Lassley appears to be very much in earnest. Could there be anything more than coincidence in these fatalities?"

"How could there be?" demanded Ballard. "Two sheer accidents and one commonplace trag-

edy, which last was the fault—or the misfortune—of poor Billy's temperament, it appears; though he was a sober enough fellow when he was here learning his trade. Let me prophesy awhile: I shall live and I shall finish building the Arcadian dam. Now let us side-track Lassley and his cryptogram and go back to what I was trying to impress on your mind when he butted in; which is that you are not to forget your promise to come out and loaf with me in August. You shall have all the luxuries a construction camp affords, and you can geologise to your heart's content in virgin soil."

"That sounds whettingly enticing," said the potential guest. "And, besides, I am immensely interested in dams; and in wire cables that give way at inopportune moments. If I were you, Breckenridge, I should make it a point to lay that broken guy cable aside. It might make interesting matter for an article in the *Engineer;* say, 'On the Effect of the Atmosphere in High Altitudes upon Galvanised Wire.'"

Ballard paid the tributary laugh. "I believe you'd have your joke if you were dying. However, I'll keep the broken cable for you, and the pool where Braithwaite was drowned, and Sanderson's inamorata—only I suppose Macpherson obliterated her at the earliest possible. . . . Say, by

Jove! that's my train he's calling. Good-by, and don't forget your promise."

After which, but for a base-runner's dash down the platform, Ballard would have lost the reward of the strenuous day of changed plans at the final moment.

II

THE TRIPPERS

IT was on the Monday afternoon that Breckenridge Ballard made the base-runner's dash through the station gates in the Boston terminal, and stood in the rearmost vestibule of his outgoing train to watch for the passing of a certain familiar suburb where, at the home of the hospitable Lassleys, he had first met Miss Craigmiles.

On the Wednesday evening following, he was gathering his belongings in the sleeper of a belated Chicago train preparatory to another dash across platforms—this time in the echoing station at Council Bluffs—to catch the waiting "Overland Flyer" for the run to Denver.

President Pelham's telegram, which had found him in Boston on the eve of closing a contract with the sugar magnates to go and build refineries in Cuba, was quite brief, but it bespoke haste:

"We need a fighting man who can build railroads and dams and dig ditches in Arcadia. Salary satisfactory to you. Wire quick if you can come."

This was the wording of it; and at the evening hour of train-changing in Council Bluffs, Ballard was sixteen hundred miles on his way, racing definitely to a conference with the president of Arcadia Irrigation in Denver, with the warning telegram from Lassley no more than a vague disturbing underthought.

What would lie beyond the conference he knew only in the large. As an industrial captain in touch with the moving world of great projects, he was familiar with the plan for the reclamation of the Arcadian desert. A dam was in process of construction, the waters of a mountain torrent were to be impounded, a system of irrigating canals opened, and a connecting link of railway built. Much of the work, he understood, was already done; and he was to take charge as chief of construction and carry it to its conclusion.

So much President Pelham's summons made clear. But what was the mystery hinted at in Lassley's telegram? And did it have any connection with that phrase in President Pelham's wire: "We need a fighting man"?

These queries, not yet satisfactorily answered, were presenting themselves afresh when Ballard followed the porter to the section reserved for him in the Denver sleeper. The car was well filled; and when he could break away from the specula-

tive entanglement long enough to look about him, he saw that the women passengers were numerous enough to make it more than probable that he would be asked, later on, to give up his lower berth to one of them.

Being masculinely selfish, and a seasoned traveller withal, he was steeling himself to say "No" to this request what time the train was rumbling over the great bridge spanning the Missouri. The bridge passage was leisurely, and there was time for a determined strengthening of the selfish defenses.

But at the Omaha station there was a fresh influx of passengers for the Denver car, and to Ballard's dismay they appeared at the first hasty glance to be all women.

"O good Lord!" he ejaculated; and finding his pipe retreated precipitately in the direction of the smoking-compartment, vaguely hoping to dodge the inevitable.

At the turn around the corner of the linen locker he glanced back. Two or three figures in the group of late comers might have asked for recognition if he had looked fairly at them; but he had eyes for only one: a modish young woman in a veiled hat and a shapeless gray box travelling-coat, who was evidently trying to explain something to the Pullman conductor.

"Jove!" he exclaimed; "if I weren't absolutely

certain that Elsa Craigmiles is half-way across the Atlantic with the Lassleys—but she is; and if she were not, she wouldn't be here, doing the 'personally conducted' for that mob." And he went on to smoke.

It was a very short time afterward that an apologetic Pullman conductor found him, and the inevitable came to pass.

"This is Mr. Ballard, I believe?"

A nod, and an uphanding of tickets.

"Thank you. I don't like to discommode you, Mr. Ballard; but—er—you have an entire section, and——"

"I know," said Ballard crisply. "The lady got on the wrong train, or she bought the wrong kind of ticket, or she took chances on finding the good-natured fellow who would give up his berth and go hang himself on a clothes-hook in the vestibule. I have been there before, but I have not yet learned how to say 'No.' Fix it up any way you please, only don't give me an upper over a flat-wheeled truck, if you can help it."

An hour later the dining-car dinner was announced; and Ballard, who had been poring over a set of the Arcadian maps and profiles and a thick packet of documents mailed to intercept him at Chicago, brought up the rear of the outgoing group from the Denver car.

In the vestibule of the diner he found the steward wrestling suavely with a late contingent of hungry ones, and explaining that the tables were all temporarily full. Ballard had broad shoulders and the Kentucky stature to match them. Looking over the heads of the others, he marked, at the farther end of the car, a table for two, with one vacant place.

"I beg your pardon—there is only one of me," he cut in; and the steward let him pass. When he had dodged the laden waiters and was taking the vacant seat he found himself confronting the young woman in the veiled hat and the gray box-coat, identified her, and discovered in a petrifying shock of astoundment that she was not Miss Elsa Craigmiles's fancied double, but Miss Craigmiles herself.

"Why, Mr. Ballard—of all people!" she cried, with a brow-lifting of genuine or well-assumed surprise. And then in mock consternation: "Don't tell me that *you* are the good-natured gentleman I drove out of his section in the sleeping-car."

"I sha'n't; because I don't know how many more there are of me," said Ballard. Then, astonishment demanding its due: "Did I only dream that you were going to Europe with the Herbert Lassleys, or——"

She made a charming little face at him.

"Do you never change your plans suddenly, Mr. Ballard? Never mind; you needn't confess: I know you do. Well, so do I. At the last moment I begged off, and Mrs. Lassley fairly scolded. She even went so far as to accuse me of not knowing my own mind for two minutes at a time."

Ballard's smile was almost grim.

"You have given me that impression now and then; when I wanted to be serious and you did not. Did you come aboard with that party at Omaha?"

"Did I not? It's my—that is, it's cousin Janet Van Bryck's party; and we are going to do Colorado this summer. Think of that as an exchange for England and a yachting voyage to Tromsoe!"

This time Ballard's smile was affectionately cynical.

"I didn't suppose you ever forgot yourself so far as to admit that there was any America west of the Alleghany Mountains."

Miss Elsa's laugh was one of her most effective weapons. Ballard was made to feel that he had laid himself open at some vulnerable point, without knowing how or why.

"Dear me!" she protested. "How long does it take you to really get acquainted with people?" Then with reproachful demureness: "The man has been waiting for five full minutes to take your dinner order."

One of Ballard's gifts was pertinacity; and after he had told the waiter what to bring, he returned to her question.

"It is taking me long enough to get acquainted with you," he ventured. "It will be two years next Tuesday since we first met at the Herbert Lassleys', and you have been delightfully good to me, and even chummy with me—when you felt like it. Yet do you know you have never once gone back of your college days in speaking of yourself? I don't know to this blessed moment whether you ever had any girlhood; and that being the case——"

"Oh, spare me!" she begged, in well-counterfeited dismay. "One would think——"

"One would not think anything of you that he ought not to think," he broke in gravely; adding: "We are a long way past the Alleghanies now, and I am glad you are aware of an America somewhat broader than it is long. Do I know any of your sightseers, besides Mrs. Van Bryck?"

"I don't know; I'll list them for you," she offered. "There are Major Blacklock, United States Engineers, retired, who always says, 'H'm—ha!' before he contradicts you; the major's nieces, Madge and Margery Cantrell—the idea of splitting one name for two girls in the same family!—and the major's son, Jerry, most hopeful when

he is pitted against other young savages on the football field. All strangers, so far?"

Ballard nodded, and she went on.

"Then there are Mrs. Van Bryck and Dosia—I am sure you have met them; and Hetty Bigelow, their cousin, twice removed, whom you have never met, if Cousin Janet could help it; and Hetty's brother, Lucius, who is something or other in the Forestry Service. Let me see; how many is that?"

"Eight," said Ballard, "counting the negligible Miss Bigelow and her tree-nursing brother."

"Good. I merely wanted to make sure you were paying attention. Last, but by no means least, there is Mr. Wingfield—*the* Mr. Wingfield, who writes plays."

Without ever having been suffered to declare himself Miss Elsa's lover, Ballard resented the saving of the playwright for the climax; also, he resented the respectful awe, real or assumed, with which his name was paraded.

"Let me remember," he said, with the frown reflective. "I believe it was Jack Forsyth the last time you confided in me. Is it Mr. Wingfield now?"

"Would you listen!" she laughed; but he made quite sure there was a blush to go with the laugh. "Do you expect me to tell you about it here and now?—with Mr. Wingfield sitting just three seats back of me, on the right?"

Ballard scowled, looked as directed, and took the measure of his latest rival.

Wingfield was at a table for four, with Mrs. Van Bryck, her daughter, and a shock-headed young man, whom Ballard took to be the football-playing Blacklock. In defiance of the clean-shaven custom of the moment, or, perhaps, because he was willing to individualise himself, the playwright wore a beard closely trimmed and pointed in the French manner; this, the quick-grasping eyes, and a certain vulpine showing of white teeth when he laughed, made Ballard liken him to an unnamed singer he had once heard in the part of *Mephistopheles*.

The overlooking glance necessarily included Wingfield's table companions: Mrs. Van Bryck's high-bred contours lost in adipose; Dosia's cool and placid prettiness—the passionless charms of unrelieved milk-whiteness of skin and masses of flaxen hair and baby-blue eyes; the Blacklock boy's square shoulders, heavy jaw, and rather fine eyes—which he kept resolutely in his plate for the better part of the time.

At the next table Ballard saw a young man with the brown of an outdoor occupation richly colouring face and hands; an old one with the contradictory "H'm—ha!" written out large in every gesture; and two young women who looked as if they might be the sharers of the single Christian name. Miss

Bigelow, the remaining member of the party, had apparently been lost in the dinner seating. At all events, Ballard did not identify her.

"Well?" said Miss Craigmiles, seeming to intimate that he had looked long enough.

"I shall know Mr. Wingfield, if I ever see him again," remarked Ballard. "Whose guest is he? Or are you all Mrs. Van Bryck's guests?"

"What an idea!" she scoffed. "Cousin Janet is going into the absolutely unknown. She doesn't reach even to the Alleghanies; her America stops short at Philadelphia. She is the chaperon; but our host isn't with us. We are to meet him in the wilds of Colorado."

"Anybody I know?" queried Ballard.

"No. And—oh, yes, I forgot; Professor Gardiner is to join us later. I knew there must be one more somewhere. But he was an afterthought. I—Cousin Janet, I mean—got his acceptance by wire at Omaha."

"Gardiner is not going to join you," said Ballard, with the cool effrontery of a proved friend. "He is going to join me."

"Where? In Cuba?"

"Oh, no; I am not going to Cuba. I am going to live the simple life; building dams and digging ditches in Arcadia."

He was well used to her swiftly changing moods.

What Miss Elsa's critics, who were chiefly of her own sex, spoke of disapprovingly as her flightiness, was to Ballard one of her characterizing charms. Yet he was quite unprepared for her grave and frankly reproachful question:

"Why aren't you going to Cuba? Didn't Mr. Lassley telegraph you not to go to Arcadia?"

"He did, indeed. But what do you know about it?—if I may venture to ask?"

For the first time in their two years' acquaintance he saw her visibly embarrassed. And her explanation scarcely explained.

"I—I was with the Lassleys in New York, you know; I went to the steamer to see them off. Mr. Lassley showed me his telegram to you after he had written it."

They had come to the little coffees, and the other members of Miss Craigmiles's party had risen and gone rearward to the sleeping-car. Ballard, more mystified than he had been at the Boston moment when Lassley's wire had found him, was still too considerate to make his companion a reluctant source of further information. Moreover, Mr. Lester Wingfield was weighing upon him more insistently than the mysteries. In times past Miss Craigmiles had made him the target for certain little arrows of confidence: he gave her an opportunity to do it again.

"Tell me about Mr. Wingfield," he suggested. "Is he truly Jack Forsyth's successor?"

"How can you question it?" she retorted gayly. "Some time—not here or now—I will tell you all about it."

"'Some time,'" he repeated. "Is it always going to be 'some time'? You have been calling me your friend for a good while, but there has always been a closed door beyond which you have never let me penetrate. And it is not my fault, as you intimated a few minutes ago. Why is it? Is it because I'm only one of many? Or is it your attitude toward all men?"

She was knotting her veil and her eyes were downcast when she answered him.

"A closed door? There is, indeed, my dear friend: two hands, one dead and one still living, closed it for us. It may be opened some time"—the phrase persisted, and she could not get away from it—"and then you will be sorry. Let us go back to the sleeping-car. I want you to meet the others." Then with a quick return to mockery: "Only I suppose you will not care to meet Mr. Wingfield?"

He tried to match her mood; he was always trying to keep up with her kaleidoscopic changes of front.

"Try me, and see," he laughed. "I guess I can stand it, if he can."

And a few minutes later he had been presented to the other members of the sight-seeing party; had taken Mrs. Van Bryck's warm fat hand of welcome and Dosia's cool one, and was successfully getting himself contradicted at every other breath by the florid-faced old campaigner, who, having been a major of engineers, was contentiously critical of young civilians who had taken their B.S. degree otherwhere than at West Point.

III

THE REVERIE OF A BACHELOR

IT was shortly after midnight when the "Overland Flyer" made its unscheduled stop behind a freight train which was blocking the track at the blind siding at Coyote. Always a light sleeper, Ballard was aroused by the jar and grind of the sudden brake-clipping; and after lying awake and listening for some time, he got up and dressed and went forward to see what had happened.

The accident was a box-car derailment, caused by a broken truck, and the men of both train crews were at work trying to get the disabled car back upon the steel and the track-blocking train out of the "Flyer's" way. Inasmuch as such problems were acutely in his line, Ballard thought of offering to help; but since there seemed to be no special need, he sat down on the edge of the ditch-cutting to look on.

The night was picture fine; starlit, and with the silent wideness of the great upland plain to give it immensity. The wind, which for the first hundred miles of the westward flight had whistled shrilly in

the car ventilators, was now lulled to a whispering zephyr, pungent with the subtle soil essence of the grass-land spring.

Ballard found a cigar and smoked it absently. His eyes followed the toilings of the train crews prying and heaving under the derailed car, with the yellow torch flares to pick them out; but his thoughts were far afield, with his dinner-table companion to beckon them.

"Companion" was the word which fitted her better than any other. Ballard had found few men, and still fewer women, completely companionable. Some one has said that comradeship is the true test of affinity; and the Kentuckian remembered with a keen appreciation of the truth of this saying a summer fortnight spent at the Herbert Lassleys' cottage on the North Shore, with Miss Craigmiles as one of his fellow-guests.

Margaret Lassley had been kind to him on that occasion, holding the reins of chaperonage lightly. There had been sunny afternoons on the breezy headlands, and blood-quickening mornings in Captain Tinkham's schooner-rigged whale-boat, when the white horses were racing across the outer reef and the water was too rough to tempt the other members of the house-party.

He had monopolised Elsa Craigmiles crudely during those two weeks, glorying in her beauty, in

her bright mind, in her triumphant physical fitness. He remembered how sturdily their comradeship had grown during the uninterrupted fortnight. He had told her all there was to tell about himself, and in return she had alternately mocked him and pretended to confide in him; the confidences touching such sentimental passages as the devotion of the Toms, the Dicks, and the Harrys of her college years.

Since he had sometimes wished to be sentimental on his own account, Ballard had been a little impatient under these frivolous appeals for sympathy. But there is a certain tonic for growing love even in such bucketings of cold water as the loved one may administer in telling the tale of the predecessor. It is a cold heart, masculine, that will not find warmth in anything short of the ice of indifference; and whatever her faults, Miss Elsa was never indifferent. Ballard recalled how he had groaned under the jesting confidences. Also, he remembered that he had never dared to repel them, choosing rather to clasp the thorns than to relinquish the rose.

From the sentimental journey past to the present stage of the same was but a step; but the present situation was rather perplexingly befogged. Why had Elsa Craigmiles changed her mind so suddenly about spending the summer in Europe? What

could have induced her to substitute a summer in Colorado, travelling under Mrs. Van Bryck's wing?

The answer to the queryings summed itself up, for the Kentuckian, in a name—the name of a man and a playwright. He held Mr. Lester Wingfield responsible for the changed plans, and was irritably resentful. In the after-dinner visit with the sightseeing party in the Pullman there had been straws to indicate the compass-point of the wind. Elsa deferred to Wingfield, as the other women did; only in her case Ballard was sure it meant more. And the playwright, between his posings as a literary oracle, assumed a quiet air of proprietorship in Miss Craigmiles that was maddening.

Ballard recalled this, sitting upon the edge of the ditch-cutting in the heart of the fragrant night, and figuratively punched Mr. Wingfield's head. Fate had been unkind to him, throwing him thus under the wheels of the opportune when the missing of a single train by either the sightseers or himself would have spared him.

Taking that view of the matter, there was grim comfort in the thought that the mangling could not be greatly prolonged. The two orbits coinciding for the moment would shortly go apart again; doubtless upon the morning's arrival in Denver. It was well. Heretofore he had been asked to

sympathise only in a subjective sense. With another lover corporeally present and answering to his name, the torture would become objective—and blankly unendurable.

Notwithstanding, he found himself looking forward with keen desire to one more meeting with the beloved tormentor—to a table exchange of thoughts and speech at the dining-car breakfast which he masterfully resolved not all the playmakers in a mumming world should forestall or interrupt.

This determination was shaping itself in the Kentuckian's brain when, after many futile backings and slack-takings, the ditched car was finally induced to climb the frogs and to drop successfully upon the rails. When the obstructing freight began to move, Ballard flung away the stump of his cigar and climbed the steps of the first open vestibule on the "Flyer," making his way to the rear between the sleeping emigrants in the day-coaches.

Being by this time hopelessly wakeful, he filled his pipe and sought the smoking-compartment of the sleeping-car. It was a measure of his abstraction that he did not remark the unfamiliarity of the place; all other reminders failing, he should have realised that the fat negro porter working his way perspiringly with brush and polish paste through a long line of shoes was not the man to

whom he had given his suit-cases in the Council Bluffs terminal.

But thinking pointedly of Elsa Craigmiles, and of the joy of sharing another meal with her in spite of the Lester Wingfields, he saw nothing, noted nothing; and the reverie, now frankly traversing the field of sentiment, ran on unbroken until he became vaguely aware that the train had stopped and started again, and that during the pause there had been sundry clankings and jerkings betokening the cutting off of a car.

A hasty question fired at the fat porter cleared the atmosphere of doubt.

"What station was that we just passed?"

"Short Line Junction, sah; whah we leaves the Denver cyar—yes, sah."

"What? Isn't this the Denver car?"

"No, indeed, sah. Dish yer cyar goes on th'oo to Ogden; yes, sah."

Ballard leaned back again and chuckled in ironic self-derision. He was not without a saving sense of humour. What with midnight prowlings and sentimental reveries he had managed to sever himself most abruptly and effectually from his car, from his hand-baggage, from the prefigured breakfast, with Miss Elsa for his *vis-à-vis;* and, what was of vastly greater importance, from the chance of a day-long business conference with President Pelham!

"Gardiner, old man, you are a true prophet; it isn't in me to think girl and to play the great game at one and the same moment," he said, flinging a word to the assistant professor of geology across the distance abysses; and the fat porter said: "Sah?"

"I was just asking what time I shall reach Denver, going in by way of the main line and Cheyenne," said Ballard, with cheerful mendacity.

"Erbout six o'clock in the evenin', sah; yes, sah. Huccome you to get lef', Cap'n Boss?"

"I didn't get left; it was the Denver sleeper that got left," laughed the Kentuckian. After which he refilled his pipe, wrote a telegram to Mr. Pelham, and one to the Pullman conductor about his hand-baggage, and resigned himself to the inevitable, hoping that the chapter of accidents had done its utmost.

Unhappily, it had not, as the day forthcoming amply proved. Reaching Cheyenne at late breakfast-time, Ballard found that the Denver train over the connecting line waited for the "Overland" from the West; also, that on this day of all days, the "Overland" was an hour behind her schedule. Hence there was haste-making extraordinary at the end of the Boston-Denver flight. When the delayed Cheyenne train clattered in over the switches, it was an hour past dark. President Pel-

ham was waiting with his automobile to whisk the new chief off to a hurried dinner-table conference at the Brown Palace; and what few explanations and instructions Ballard got were sandwiched between the *consommé au gratin* and the dessert.

Two items of information were grateful. The Fitzpatrick Brothers, favourably known to Ballard, were the contractors on the work; and Loudon Bromley, who had been his friend and loyal understudy in the technical school, was still the assistant engineer, doing his best to push the construction in the absence of a superior.

Since the chief of any army stands or falls pretty largely by the grace of his subordinates, Ballard was particularly thankful for Bromley. He was little and he was young; he dressed like an exquisite, wore neat little patches of side-whiskers, shot straight, played the violin, and stuffed birds for relaxation. But in spite of these hindrances, or, perhaps, because of some of them, he could handle men like a born captain, and he was a friend whose faithfulness had been proved more than once.

"I shall be only too glad to retain Bromley," said Ballard, when the president told him he might choose his own assistant. And, as time pressed, he asked if there were any other special instructions.

"Nothing specific," was the reply. "Bromley has kept things moving, but they can be made to move faster, and we believe you are the man to set the pace, Mr. Ballard; that's all. And now, if you are ready, we have fifteen minutes in which to catch the Alta Vista train—plenty of time, but none to throw away. I have reserved your sleeper."

It was not until after the returning automobile spin; after Ballard had checked his baggage and had given his recovered suit-cases to the porter of the Alta Vista car; that he learned the significance of the fighting clause in the president's Boston telegram.

They were standing at the steps of the Pullman for the final word; had drawn aside to make room for a large party of still later comers; when the president said, with the air of one who gathers up the unconsidered trifles:

"By the way, Mr. Ballard, you may not find it all plain sailing up yonder. Arcadia Park has been for twenty years a vast cattle-ranch, owned, or rather usurped, by a singular old fellow who is known as the 'King of Arcadia.' Quite naturally, he opposes our plan of turning the park into a well-settled agricultural field, to the detriment of his free cattle range, and he is fighting us."

"In the courts, you mean?"

"In the courts and out of them. I might mention that it was one of his cow-men who killed Sanderson; though that was purely a personal quarrel, I believe. The trouble began with his refusal to sell us a few acres of land and a worthless mining-claim which our reservoir may submerge, and we were obliged to resort to the courts. He is fighting for delay now, and in the meantime he encourages his cowboys to maintain a sort of guerrilla warfare on the contractors: stealing tools, disabling machinery, and that sort of thing. This was Macpherson's story, and I'm passing it on to you. You are forty miles from the nearest sheriff's office over there; but when you need help, you'll get it. Of course, the company will back you—to the last dollar in the treasury, if necessary."

Ballard's rejoinder was placatory. "It seems a pity to open up the new country with a feud," he said, thinking of his native State and of what these little wars had done for some portions of it. "Can't the old fellow be conciliated in some way?"

"I don't know," replied the president doubtfully. "We want peaceable possession, of course, if we can get it; capital is always on the side of peace. In fact, we authorised Macpherson to buy peace at any price in reason, and we'll give you the same authority. But Macpherson always rep-

resented the old cattle king as being unapproachable on that side. On the other hand, we all know what Macpherson was. He had a pretty rough tongue when he was at his best; and he was in bad health for a long time before the derrick fell on him. I dare say he didn't try diplomacy."

"I'll make love to the cow-punching princesses," laughed Ballard; "that is, if there are any."

"There is one, I understand; but I believe she doesn't spend much of her time at home. The old man is a widower, and, apart from his senseless fight on the company, he appears to be—but I won't prejudice you in advance."

"No, don't," said Ballard. "I'll size things up for myself on the ground. I——"

The interruption was the dash of a switch-engine up the yard with another car to be coupled to the waiting mountain line train. Ballard saw the lettering on the medallion: "08."

"Somebody's private hotel?" he remarked.

"Yes. It's Mr. Brice's car, I guess. He was in town to-day."

Ballard was interested at once.

"Mr. Richard Brice?—the general manager of the D. & U. P.?"

The president nodded.

"That's great luck," said Ballard, warmly. "We were classmates in the Institute, and I haven't seen

him since he came West. I think I'll ride in the Naught-eight till bedtime."

"Glad you know him," said the president. "Get in a good word for our railroad connection with his line at Alta Vista, while you're about it. There is your signal; good-by, and good luck to you. Don't forget—'drive' is the word; for every man, minute, and dollar there is in it."

Ballard shook the presidential hand and swung up to the platform of the private car. A reluctant porter admitted him, and thus it came about that he did not see the interior of his own sleeper until long after the other passengers had gone to bed.

"Good load to-night, John?" he said to the porter, when, the private car visit being ended, the man was showing him to his made-down berth.

"Yes, sah; mighty good for de branch. But right smart of dem is ladies, and dey don't he'p de po' portah much."

"Well, I'll pay for one of them, anyway," said the Kentuckian, good-naturedly doubling his tip. "Be sure you rout me out bright and early; I want to get ahead of the crowd."

And he wound his watch and went to bed, serenely unconscious that the hat upon the rail-hook next to his own belonged to Mr. Lester Wingfield; that the hand-bags over which he had stum-

bled in the dimly lighted aisle were the *impedimenta* of the ladies Van Bryck; or that the dainty little boots proclaiming the sex—and youth—of his fellow-traveller in the opposite Number Six were the foot-gear of Miss Elsa Craigmiles.

IV

ARCADY

ARCADIA PARK, as the government map-makers have traced it, is a high-lying, enclosed valley in the heart of the middle Rockies, roughly circular in outline, with a curving westward sweep of the great range for one-half of its circumscribing rampart, and the bent bow of the Elk Mountains for the other.

Apart from storming the rampart heights, accessible only to the hardy prospector or to the forest ranger, there are three ways of approach to the shut-in valley: up the outlet gorge of the Boiling Water, across the Elk Mountains from the Roaring Fork, or over the high pass in the Continental Divide from Alta Vista.

It was from the summit of the high pass that Ballard had his first view of Arcadia. From Alta Vista the irrigation company's narrow-gauge railway climbs through wooded gorges and around rock-ribbed snow balds, following the route of the old stage trail; and Ballard's introductory picture

of the valley was framed in the cab window of the locomotive sent over by Bromley to transport him to the headquarters camp on the Boiling Water.

In the wide prospect opened by the surmounting of the high pass there was little to suggest the human activities, and still less to foreshadow strife. Ballard saw a broad-acred oasis in the mountain desert, billowed with undulating meadows, and having for its colour scheme the gray-green of the range grasses. Winding among the billowy hills in the middle distance, a wavering double line of aspens marked the course of the Boiling Water. Nearer at hand the bald slopes of the Saguache pitched abruptly to the forested lower reaches; and the path of the railway, losing itself at the timber line, reappeared as a minute scratch scoring the edge of the gray-green oasis, to vanish, distance effaced, near a group of mound-shaped hills to the eastward.

The start from Alta Vista with the engine "special" had been made at sunrise, long before any of Ballard's fellow-travellers in the sleeping-car were stirring. But the day had proved unseasonably warm in the upper snow fields, and there had been time-killing delays.

Every gulch had carried its torrent of melted snow to threaten the safety of the unballasted track, and what with slow speed over the hazards

and much shovelling of land-slips in the cuttings, the sun was dipping to the westward range when the lumbering little construction engine clattered down the last of the inclines and found the long level tangents in the park.

On the first of the tangents the locomotive was stopped at a watering-tank. During the halt Ballard climbed down from his cramped seat on the fireman's box and crossed the cab to the engineman's gangway. Hoskins, the engine-driver, leaning from his window, pointed out the projected course of the southern lateral canal in the great irrigation system.

"It'll run mighty nigh due west here, about half-way between us and the stage trail," he explained; and Ballard, looking in the direction indicated, said: "Where is the stage trail? I haven't seen it since we left the snow balds."

"It's over yonder in the edge of the timber," was the reply; and a moment later its precise location was defined by three double-seated buckboards, passenger-laden and drawn by four-in-hand teams of tittupping broncos, flicking in and out among the pines and pushing rapidly eastward. The distance was too great for recognition, but Ballard could see that there were women in each of the vehicles.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Those people must

have crossed the range from Alta Vista to-day. What is the attraction over here?—a summer-resort hotel?"

"Not any in this valley," said the engineman. "They might be going on over to Ashcroft, or maybe to Aspen, on the other side o' the Elk Mountains. But if that's their notion, they're due to camp out somewhere, right soon. It's all o' forty mile to the neardest of the Roaring Fork towns."

The engine tank was filled, and the fireman was flinging the dripping spout to its perpendicular. Ballard took his seat again, and became once more immersed in his topographical studies of the new field; which was possibly why the somewhat singular spectacle of a party of tourists hastening on to meet night and the untaverned wilderness passed from his mind.

The approach to the headquarters camp of the Arcadia Company skirted the right bank of the Boiling Water, in this portion of its course a river of the plain, eddying swiftly between the aspen-fringed banks. But a few miles farther on, where the gentle undulations of the rich grass-land gave place to bare, rock-capped hills, the stream broke at intervals into noisy rapids, with deep pools to mark the steps of its descent.

Ballard's seat on the fireman's box was on the

wrong side for the topographical purpose, and he crossed the cab to stand at Hoskins's elbow. As they were passing one of the stillest of the pools, the engineman said, with a sidewise jerk of his thumb:

"That's the place where Mr. Braithwaite was drowned. Came down here from camp to catch a mess o' trout for his supper and fell in—from the far bank."

"Couldn't he swim?" Ballard asked.

"They all say he could. Anyhow, it looks as if he might 'a' got out o' that little mill-pond easy enough. But he didn't. They found his fishing tackle on the bank, and him down at the foot of the second rapid below—both arms broke and the top of his head caved in, like he'd been run through a rock-crusher. They can say what they please; I ain't believin' the river done it."

"What do you believe?" Ballard was looking across to a collection of low buildings and corrals —evidently the headquarters of the old cattle king's ranch outfit—nestling in a sheltered cove beyond the stream, and his question was a half-conscious thought slipping into speech.

"I believe this whole blame' job is a hoodoo," was the prompt rejoinder. And then, with the freedom born of long service in the unfettered areas where discipline means obedience but not

servility, the man added: "I wouldn't be standin' in your shoes this minute for all the money the Arcadia Company could pay me, Mr. Ballard."

Ballard was young, fit, vigorous, and in abounding health. Moreover, he was a typical product of an age which scoffs at superstition and is impatient of all things irreducible to the terms of algebraic formulas. But here and now, on the actual scene of the fatalities, the "two sheer accidents and a commonplace tragedy" were somewhat less easily dismissed than when he had thus contemptuously named them for Gardiner in the Boston railway station. Notwithstanding, he was quite well able to shake off the little thrill of disquietude and to laugh at Hoskins's vicarious anxiety.

"I wasn't raised in the woods, Hoskins, but there was plenty of tall timber near enough to save me from being scared by an owl," he asseverated. Then, as a towering derrick head loomed gallows-like in the gathering dusk, with a white blotch of masonry to fill the ravine over which it stood sentinel: "Is that our camp?"

"That's Elbow Canyon," said the engineman; and he shut off steam and woke the hill echoes with the whistle.

Ballard made out something of the lay of the land at the headquarters while the engine was

slowing through the temporary yard. There was the orderly disorder of a construction terminal: tracks littered with cars of material, a range of rough shed shelters for the stone-cutters, a dotting of sleeping-huts and adobes on a little mesa above, and a huge, weathered mess-tent, lighted within, and glowing orange-hued in the twilight. Back of the camp the rounded hills grew suddenly precipitous, but through the river gap guarded by the sentinel derrick, there was a vista distantly backgrounded by the mass of the main range rising darkly under its evergreens, with the lights of a great house starring the deeper shadow.

V

"FIRE IN THE ROCK!"

BROMLEY was on hand to meet his new chief when Ballard dropped from the step of the halted engine. A few years older, and browned to a tender mahogany by the sun of the altitudes and the winds of the desert, he was still the Bromley of Ballard's college memories: compact, alert, boyishly smiling, neat, and well-groomed. With Anglo-Saxon ancestry on both sides, the meeting could not be demonstrative.

"Same little old 'Beau Bromley,'" was Ballard's greeting to go with the hearty hand-grip; and Bromley's reply was in keeping. After which they climbed the slope to the mesa and the headquarters office in comradely silence, not because there was nothing to be said, but because the greater part of it would keep.

Having picked up the engine "special" with his field-glass as it came down the final zigzag in the descent from the pass, Bromley had supper waiting in the adobe-walled shack which served as the

engineers' quarters; and until the pipes were lighted after the meal there was little talk save of the golden past. But when the camp cook had cleared the table, Ballard reluctantly closed the book of reminiscence and gave the business affair its due.

"How are you coming on with the work, Loudon?" he asked. "Don't need a chief, do you?"

"Don't you believe it!" said the substitute, with such heartfelt emphasis that Ballard smiled. "I'm telling you right now, Breckenridge, I never was so glad to shift a responsibility since I was born. Another month of it alone would have turned me gray."

"And yet, in my hearing, people are always saying that you are nothing less than a genius when it comes to handling workingmen. Isn't it so?"

"Oh, that part of it is all right. It's the hoodoo that is making an old man of me before my time."

"The what?"

Bromley moved uneasily in his chair, and Ballard could have sworn that he gave a quick glance into the dark corners of the room before he said: "I'm giving you the men's name for it. But with or without a name, it hangs over this job like the shadow of a devil-bat's wings. The men sit around and smoke and talk about it till bedtime, and the next day some fellow makes a bad hitch

on a stone, or a team runs away, or a blast hangs fire in the quarry, and we have a dead man for supper. Breckenridge, it is simply *hell!*"

Ballard shook his head incredulously.

"You've let a few ill-natured coincidences rattle you," was his comment. "What is it? Or, rather, what is at the bottom of it?"

"I don't know; nobody knows. The 'coincidences,' as you call them, were here when I came; handed down from Braithwaite's drowning, I suppose. Then Sanderson got tangled up with Manuel's woman—as clear a case of superinduced insanity as ever existed—and in less than two months he and Manuel jumped in with Winchesters, and poor Billy passed out. That got on everybody's nerves, of course; and then Macpherson came. You know what he was—a hard-headed, sarcastic old Scotchman, with the bitterest tongue that was ever hung in the middle and adjusted to wag both ways. He tried ridicule; and when that didn't stop the crazy happenings, he took to bullyragging. The day the derrick fell on him he was swearing horribly at the hoister engineer; and he died with an oath in his mouth."

The Kentuckian sat back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Let me get one thing straight before you go on. Mr. Pelham told me of a scrap between the com-

pany and an old fellow up here who claims everything in sight. Has this emotional insanity you are talking about anything to do with the old cattle king's objection to being syndicated out of existence?"

"No; only incidentally in Sanderson's affair—which, after all, was a purely personal quarrel between two men over a woman. And I wouldn't care to say that Manuel was wholly to blame in that."

"Who is this Manuel?" queried Ballard.

"Oh, I thought you knew. He is the colonel's manager and ranch foreman. He is a Mexican and an all-round scoundrel, with one lonesome good quality—absolute and unimpeachable loyalty to his master. The colonel turns the entire business of the cattle raising and selling over to him; doesn't go near the ranch once a month himself."

"'The colonel,'" repeated Ballard. "You call him 'the colonel,' and Mr. Pelham calls him the 'King of Arcadia.' I assume that he has a name, like other men?"

"Sure!" said Bromley. "Hadn't you heard it? It's Craigmiles."

"What!" exclaimed Ballard, holding the match with which he was about to relight his pipe until the flame crept up and scorched his fingers.

"That's it—Craigmiles; Colonel Adam Craig-

miles—the King of Arcadia. Didn't Mr. Pelham tell you——"

"Hold on a minute," Ballard cut in; and he got out of his chair to pace back and forth on his side of the table while he was gathering up the pieces scattered broadcast by this explosive petard of a name.

At first he saw only the clearing up of the little mysteries shrouding Miss Elsa's suddenly changed plans for the summer; how they were instantly resolved into the commonplace and the obvious. She had merely decided to come home and play hostess to her father's guests. And since she knew about the war for the possession of Arcadia, and would quite naturally be sorry to have her friend pitted against her father, it seemed unnecessary to look further for the origin of Lassley's curiously worded telegram. "Lassley's," Ballard called it; but if Lassley had signed it, it was fairly certain now that Miss Craigmiles had dictated it.

Ballard thought her use of the fatalities as an argument in the warning message was a purely feminine touch. None the less he held her as far above the influences of the superstitions as he held himself, and it was a deeper and more reflective second thought that turned a fresh leaf in the book of mysteries.

Was it possible that the three violent deaths were

not mere coincidences, after all? And, admitting design, could it be remotely conceivable that Adam Craigmiles's daughter was implicated, even to the guiltless degree of suspecting it? Ballard stopped short in his pacing sentry beat and began to investigate, not without certain misgivings.

"Loudon, what manner of man is this Colonel Craigmiles?"

Bromley's reply was characteristic. "The finest ever—type of the American country gentleman; suave, courteous, a little inclined to be grandiloquent; does the paternal with you till you catch yourself on the edge of saying 'sir' to him; and has the biggest, deepest, sweetest voice that ever drawled the Southern 'r.'"

"Humph! That isn't exactly the portrait of a fire-eater."

"Don't you make any mistake. I've described the man you'll meet socially. On the other side, he's a fighter from away back; the kind of man who makes no account of the odds against him, and who doesn't know when he is licked. He has told us openly and repeatedly that he will do us up if we swamp his house and mine; that he will make it pinch us for the entire value of our investment in the dam. I believe he'll do it, too; but President Pelham won't back down an inch. So there you are—irresistible moving body; immovable

fixed body: the collision imminent; and we poor devils in between."

Ballard drew back his chair and sat down again. "You are miles beyond my depth now," he asserted. "I had less than an hour with Mr. Pelham in Denver, and what he didn't tell me would make a good-sized library. Begin at the front, and let me have the story of this feud between the company and Colonel Craigmiles."

Again Bromley said: "I supposed, of course, that you knew all about it"—after which he supplied the missing details.

"It was Braithwaite who was primarily to blame. When the company's plans were made public, the colonel did not oppose them, though he knew that the irrigation scheme spelled death to the cattle industry. The fight began when Braithwaite located the dam here at Elbow Canyon in the foothill hogback. There is a better site farther down the river; a second depression where an earthwork dike might have taken the place of all this costly rockwork."

"I saw it as we came up this evening."

"Yes. Well, the colonel argued for the lower site; offered to donate three or four homesteads in it which he had taken up through his employees; offered further to take stock in the company; but Braithwaite was pig-headed about it. He had

been a Government man, and was a crank on permanent structures and things monumental; wherefore he was determined on building masonry. He ignored the colonel, reported on the present site, and the work was begun."

"Go on," said Ballard.

"Naturally, the colonel took this as a flat declaration of war. He has a magnificent country house in the upper valley, which must have cost him, at this distance from a base of supplies, a round half-million or more. When we fill our reservoir, this house will stand on an island of less than a half-dozen acres in extent, with its orchards, lawns, and ornamental grounds all under water. Which the same is tough."

Ballard was Elsa Craigmiles's lover, and he agreed in a single forcible expletive. Bromley acquiesced in the expletive, and went on.

"The colonel refused to sell his country-house holding, as a matter of course; and the company decided to take chances on the suit for damages which will naturally follow the flooding of the property. Meanwhile, Braithwaite had organised his camp, and the foundations were going in. A month or so later, he and the colonel had a personal collision, and, although Craigmiles was old enough to be his father, Braithwaite struck him. There was blood on the moon, right there and then,

as you'd imagine. The colonel was unarmed, and he went home to get a gun. Braithwaite, who was always a cold-blooded brute, got out his fishing-tackle and sauntered off down the river to catch a mess of trout. He never came back alive."

"Good heavens! But the colonel couldn't have had any hand in Braithwaite's drowning!" Ballard burst out, thinking altogether of Colonel Craigmiles's daughter.

"Oh, no. At the time of the accident, the colonel was back here at the camp, looking high and low for Braithwaite with fire in his eye. They say he went crazy mad with disappointment when he found that the river had robbed him of his right to kill the man who had struck him."

Ballard was silent for a time. Then he said: "You spoke of a mine that would also be flooded by our reservoir. What about that?"

"That came in after Braithwaite's death and Sanderson's appointment as chief engineer. When Braithwaite made his location here, there was an old prospect tunnel in the hill across the canyon. It was boarded up and apparently abandoned, and no one seemed to know who owned it. Later on it transpired that the colonel was the owner, and that the mining claim, which was properly patented and secured, actually covers the ground upon which our dam stands. While Sanderson was busy

brewing trouble for himself with Manuel, the colonel put three Mexicans at work in the tunnel; and they have been digging away there ever since."

"Gold?" asked Ballard.

Bromley laughed quietly.

"Maybe you can find out—nobody else has been able to. But it isn't gold; it must be something infinitely more valuable. The tunnel is fortified like a fortress, and one or another of the Mexicans is on guard day and night. The mouth of the tunnel is lower than the proposed level of the dam, and the colonel threatens all kinds of things, telling us frankly that it will break the Arcadia Company financially when we flood that mine. I have heard him tell Mr. Pelham to his face that the water should never flow over any dam the company might build here; that he would stick at nothing to defend his property. Mr. Pelham says all this is only bluff; that the mine is worthless. But the fact remains that the colonel is immensely rich—and is apparently growing richer."

"Has nobody ever seen the inside of this Golconda of a mine?" queried Ballard.

"Nobody from our side of the fence. As I've said, it is guarded like the sultan's seraglio; and the Mexicans might as well be deaf and dumb for all you can get out of them. Macpherson, who was loyal to the company, first, last, and all the time,

had an assay made from some of the stuff spilled out on the dump; but there was nothing doing, so far as the best analytical chemist in Denver could find out."

For the first time since the strenuous day of plan-changing in Boston, Ballard was almost sorry he had given up the Cuban undertaking.

"It's a beautiful tangle!" he snapped, thinking, one would say, of the breach that must be opened between the company's chief engineer and the daughter of the militant old cattle king. Then he changed the subject abruptly.

"What do you know about the colonel's household, Loudon?"

"All there is to know, I guess. He lives in state in his big country mansion that looks like a World's Fair Forest Products Exhibit on the outside, and is fitted and furnished regardless of expense in its interiors. He is a widower with one daughter—who comes and goes as she pleases—and a sister-in-law who is the dearest, finest piece of fragile old china you ever read about."

"You've been in the country house, then?"

"Oh, yes. The colonel hasn't made it a personal fight on the working force since Braithwaite's time."

"Perhaps you have met Miss—er—the daughter who comes and goes?"

"Sure I have! If you'll promise not to discipline me for hobnobbing with the enemy, I'll confess that I've even played duets with her. She discovered my weakness for music when she was home last summer."

"Do you happen to know where she is now?"

"On her way to Europe, I believe. At least, that is what Miss Cauffrey—she's the fragile-china aunt—was telling me."

"I think not," said Ballard, after a pause. "I think she changed her mind and decided to spend the summer at home. When we stopped at Ackerman's to take water this evening, I saw three loaded buckboards driving in this direction."

"That doesn't prove anything," asserted Bromley. "The old colonel has a house-party every little while. He's no anchorite, if he does live in the desert."

Ballard was musing again. "Adam Craigmiles," he said, thoughtfully. "I wonder what there is in that name to set some sort of bee buzzing in my head. If I believed in transmigration, I should say that I had known that name, and known it well, in some other existence."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bromley. "It's not such an unusual name."

"No; if it were, I might trace it. How long did you say the colonel had lived in Arcadia?"

"I didn't say. But it must be something over twenty years. Miss Elsa was born here."

"And the family is Southern—from what section?"

"I don't know that—Virginia, perhaps, measuring by the colonel's accent, pride, hot-headedness, and reckless hospitality."

The clue, if any there were, appeared to be lost; and again Ballard smoked on in silence. When the pipe burned out he refilled it, and at the match-striking instant a sing-song cry of "Fire in the rock!" floated down from the hill crags above the adobe, and the jar of a near-by explosion shook the air and rattled the windows.

"What was that?" he queried.

"It's our quarry gang getting out stone," was Bromley's reply. "We were running short of headers for the tie courses, and I put on a night-shift."

"Whereabouts is your quarry?"

"Just around the shoulder of the hill, and a hundred feet, or such a matter, above us. It is far enough to be out of range."

A second explosion punctuated the explanation. Then there was a third and still heavier shock, a rattling of pebbles on the sheet-iron roof of the adobe, and a scant half-second later a fragment of stone the size of a man's head crashed through roof

and ceiling and made kindling-wood of the light pine table at which the two men were sitting. Ballard sprang to his feet, and said something under his breath; but Bromley sat still, with a faint yellow tint discolouring the sunburn on his face

"Which brings us back to our starting-point—the hoodoo," he said quietly. "To-morrow morning, when you go around the hill and see where that stone came from, you'll say that it was a sheer impossibility. Yet the impossible thing has happened. It is reaching for you now, Breckenridge; and a foot or two farther that way would have—" He stopped, swallowed hard, and rose unsteadily. "For God's sake, old man, throw up this cursed job and get out of here, while you can do it alive!"

"Not much!" said the new chief contemptuously. And then he asked which of the two bunks in the adjoining sleeping-room was his.

VI

ELBOW CANYON

BALLARD had his first appreciative view of his new field of labor before breakfast on the morning following his arrival, with Bromley as his sightsman.

Viewed in their entirety by daylight, the topographies appealed irresistibly to the technical eye; and Ballard no longer wondered that Braithwaite had overlooked or disregarded all other possible sites for the great dam.

The basin enclosed by the circling foot-hills and backed by the forested slopes of the main range was a natural reservoir, lacking only a comparatively short wall of masonry to block the crooked gap in the hills through which the river found its way to the lower levels of the grass-lands.

The gap itself was an invitation to the engineer. Its rock-bound slopes promised the best of anchorages for the shore-ends of the masonry; and at its lower extremity a jutting promontory on the right bank of the stream made a sharp angle in the

chasm; the elbow which gave the outlet canyon its name.

The point or crook of the elbow, the narrowest pass in the cleft, had been chosen as the site for the dam. Through the promontory a short tunnel was driven at the river-level to provide a diverting spillway for the torrent; and by this simple expedient a dry river-bed in which to build the great wall of concrete and masonry had been secured.

"That was Braithwaite's notion, I suppose?" said Ballard, indicating the tunnel through which the stream, now at summer freshet volume, thundered on its way around the building site to plunge sullenly into its natural bed below the promontory. "Nobody but a Government man would have had the courage to spend so much time and money on a mere preliminary. It's a good notion, though."

"I'm not so sure of that," was Bromley's reply. "Doylan, the rock-boss, tells a fairy-story about the tunnel that will interest you when you hear it. He had the contract for driving it, you know."

"What was the story?"

Bromley laughed. "You'll have to get Mike to tell it, with the proper Irish frills. But the gist of it is this: You know these hogback hills—how they seem to be made up of all the geological odds and ends left over after the mountains were built.

Mike swears they drove through limestone, sandstone, porphyry, fire-clay, chert, mica-schist, and *mud* digging that tunnel; which the same, if true, doesn't promise very well for the foundations of our dam."

"But the plans call for bed-rock under the masonry," Ballard objected.

"Oh, yes; and we have it—apparently. But some nights, when I've lain awake listening to the peculiar hollow roar of the water pounding through that tunnel, I've wondered if Doylan's streak of mud mightn't underlie our bed-rock."

Ballard's smile was good-naturedly tolerant.

"You'd be a better engineer, if you were not a musician, Loudon. You have too much imagination. Is that the colonel's country house up yonder in the middle of our reservoir-that-is-to-be?"

"It is."

Ballard focussed his field-glass upon the tree-dotted knoll a mile away in the centre of the upper valley. It was an ideal building site for the spectacular purpose. On all sides the knoll sloped gently to the valley level; and the river, a placid vale-land stream in this upper reach, encircled three sides of the little hill. Among the trees, and distinguishable from them only by its right lines and gable angles, stood a noble house, built, as it seemed, of great tree-trunks with the bark on.

Ballard could imagine the inspiring outlook from the brown-pillared Greek portico facing westward; the majestic sweep of the enclosing hills, bare and with their rocky crowns worn into a thousand fantastic shapes; the uplift of the silent, snow-capped mountains to right and left; the vista of the broad, outer valley opening through the gap where the dam was building.

"The colonel certainly had an eye for the picturesque when he pitched upon that knoll for his building-site," was his comment. "How does he get the water up there to make all that greenery?"

"Pumps it, bless your heart! What few modern improvements you won't find installed at Castle 'Cadia aren't worth mentioning. And, by the way, there is another grouch—we're due to drown his power-pumping and electric plant at the portal of the upper canyon under twenty feet of our lake. More bad blood, and a lot more damages."

"Oh, damn!" said Ballard; and he meant the imprecation, and not the pile of masonry which his predecessors had heaped up in the rocky chasm at his feet.

Bromley chuckled. "That is what the colonel is apt to say when you mention the Arcadia Company in his hearing. Do you blame him so very much?"

"Not I. If I owned a home like that, in a wil-

derness that I had discovered for myself, I'd fight for it to a finish. Last night when you showed me the true inwardness of this mix-up, I was sick and sorry. If I had known five days ago what I know now, you couldn't have pulled me into it with a two-inch rope."

"On general principles?" queried Bromley curiously.

"Not altogether. Business is business; and you've intimated that the colonel is not so badly overmatched in the money field—and when all is said, it is a money fight with the long purse to win. But there is a personal reason why I, of all men in the world, should have stayed out. I did not know it when I accepted Mr. Pelham's offer, and now it is too late to back down. I'm a thousand times sorrier for Colonel Craigmiles than ever you can be, Loudon; but, as the chief engineer of the Arcadia Company, I'm pledged to obliterate him."

"That is precisely what he declares he will do to the company," laughed Bromley. "And there," —pointing across the ravine to an iron-bound door closing a tunnel entrance in the opposite hillside— "is his advanced battery. That is the mine I was telling you about."

"H'm," said the new chief, measuring the distance with his eyes. "If that mining-claim is the

regulation size, it doesn't leave us much elbow room over there."

"It doesn't leave us any—as I told you last night, the dam itself stands upon a portion of the claim. In equity, if there were any equity in a law fight against a corporation, the colonel could enjoin us right now. He hasn't done it; he has contented himself with marking out that dead-line you can see over there just above our spillway. The colonel staked that out in Billy Sanderson's time, and courteously informed us that trespassers would be potted from behind that barricade; that there was a machine-gun mounted just inside of that door which commanded the approaches. Just to see if he meant what he said, some of the boys rigged up a scarecrow dummy, and carefully pushed it over the line one evening after supper. I wasn't here, but Fitzpatrick says the colonel's Mexican garrison in the tunnel fairly set the air afire with a volley from the machine-gun."

Ballard said "H'm" again, and was silent what time they were climbing the hill to the quarries on their own side of the ravine. When he spoke, it was not of the stone the night shift had been getting out.

"Loudon, has it ever occurred to you that the colonel's mine play is a very large-sized trump card? We can submerge the house, the grounds,

and his improvements up yonder in the upper canyon and know approximately how much it is going to cost the company to pay the bill. But when the water backs up into that tunnel, we are stuck for whatever damages he cares to claim."

"Sure thing," said Bromley. "No one on earth will ever know whether we've swamped a five-million-dollar mine or a twenty-five-cent hole in the ground."

"That being the case, I mean to see the inside of that tunnel," Ballard went on doggedly. "I am sorry I allowed Mr. Pelham to let me in for this; but in justice to the people who pay my salary, I must know what we are up against over there."

"I don't believe you will make any bad breaks in that direction," Bromley suggested. "If you try it by main strength and awkwardness, as Macpherson did, you'll get what he very narrowly escaped—a young lead mine started inside of you by one of the colonel's Mexican bandits. If you try it any other way, the colonel will be sure to spot you; and you go out of his good books and Miss Elsa's—no invitations to the big house, no social alleviations, no ice-cream and cake, no heavenly summer nights when you can sit out on the Greek-pillared portico with a pretty girl, and forget for the moment that you are a buccaneering

bully of labouring men, marooned, with a lot of dry-land pirates like yourself, in the Arcadia desert. No, my dear Breckenridge; I think it is safe to prophesy that you won't do anything you say you will."

"Won't I?" growled the new chief, looking at his watch. Then: "Let's go down to breakfast." And, with a sour glance at the hill over which the roof-smashing rock of the previous night must have been hurled: "Don't forget to tell Quinlan to be a little more sparing with his powder up here. Impress it on his mind that he is getting out building stone—not shooting the hill down for concrete."

VII

THE POLO PLAYERS

BALLARD gave the Saturday, his first day in in the new field, to Bromley and the work on the dam, inspecting, criticising, suggesting changes, and otherwise adjusting the wheels of the complicated constructing mechanism at the Elbow Canyon nerve centre to run efficiently and smoothly, and at accelerated speed.

"That's about all there is to say," he summed up to his admiring assistant, at the close of his first administrative day. "You're keyed up to concert pitch all right, here, and the *tempo* is not so bad. But 'drive' is the word, Loudon. Wherever you see a chance to cut a corner, cut it. The Fitzpatricks are a little inclined to be slow and sure: crowd the idea into old Brian's head that bonuses are earned by being swift and sure."

"Which means that you're not going to stay here and drive the stone and concrete gangs yourself?" queried Bromley.

"That is what it means, for the present," replied

the new chief; and at daybreak Monday morning he was off, bronco-back, to put in a busy fortnight quartering the field in all directions and getting in touch with the various subcontractors at the many subsidiary camps of ditch diggers and railroad builders scattered over the length and breadth of the Kingdom of Arcadia.

On one of the few nights when he was able to return to the headquarters camp for supper and lodging, Bromley proposed a visit to Castle 'Cadia. Ballard's refusal was prompt and decided.

"No, Loudon; not for me, yet a while. I'm too tired to be anybody's good company," was the form the refusal took. "Go gossiping, if you feel like it, but leave me out of the social game until I get a little better grip on the working details. Later on, perhaps, I'll go with you and pay my respects to Colonel Craigmiles—but not to-night."

Bromley went alone and found that Ballard's guess based upon his glimpse of the loaded buckboards *en route* was borne out by the facts. Castle 'Cadia was comfortably filled with a summer house-party; and Miss Craigmiles had given up her European yachting voyage to come home and play the hostess to her father's guests.

Also, Bromley discovered that the colonel's daughter drew her own conclusions from Ballard's refusal to present himself, the discovery develop-

ing upon Miss Elsa's frank statement of her convictions.

"I know your new tyrant," she laughed; "I have known him for ages. He won't come to Castle 'Cadia; he is afraid we might make him disloyal to his Arcadia Irrigation salt. You may tell him I said so, if you happen to remember it."

Bromley did remember it, but it was late when he returned to the camp at the canyon, and Ballard was asleep. And the next morning the diligent new chief was mounted and gone as usual long before the "turn-out" whistle blew; for which cause Miss Elsa's challenge remained undelivered; was allowed to lie until the dust of intervening busy days had quite obscured it.

It was on these scouting gallops to the outlying camps that Ballard defined the limits of the "hoodoo." Its influence, he found, diminished proportionately as the square of the distance from the headquarters camp at Elbow Canyon. But in the wider field there were hindrances of another and more tangible sort.

Bourke Fitzpatrick, the younger of the brothers in the contracting firm, was in charge of the ditch digging; and he had irritating tales to tell of the lawless doings of Colonel Craigmiles's herdsmen.

"I'm telling you, Mr. Ballard, there isn't anything them devils won't be up to," he complained,

not without bitterness. "One night they'll uncouple every waggon on the job and throw the coupling-pins away; and the next, maybe, they'll be stampeding the mules. Two weeks ago, on Dan Moriarty's section, they came with men and horses in the dead of night, hitched up the scrapers, and put a thousand yards of earth back into the ditch."

"Wear it out good-naturedly, if you can, Bourke; it is only horse-play," was Ballard's advice. That grown men should seriously hope to defeat the designs of a great corporation by any such puerile means was inconceivable.

"Horse-play, is it?" snapped Fitzpatrick. "Don't you believe it, Mr. Ballard. I can take a joke with any man living; but this is no joke. It comes mighty near being war—with the scrapping all on one side."

"A night guard?" suggested Ballard.

Fitzpatrick shook his head.

"We've tried that; and you'll not get a man to patrol the work since Denny Flaherty took his medicine. The cow-punchers roped him and skidded him 'round over the prairie till it took one of the men a whole blessed day to dig the cactus thorns out of him. And me paying both of them overtime. Would you call that a joke?"

Ballard's reply revealed some latent doubt as

to the justification for Bromley's defense of Colonel Craigmiles's fighting methods.

"If it isn't merely rough horse-play, it is guerrilla warfare, as you say, Bourke. Have you seen anything to make you believe that these fellows have a tip from the big house in the upper valley?"

The contractor shook his head.

"The colonel doesn't figure in the details of the cow business at all, as far as anybody can see. He turns it all over to Manuel, his Mexican foreman; and Manuel is in this guerrilla deviltry as big as anybody. Flaherty says he'll take his oath that the foreman was with the gang that roped him."

Ballard was feeling less peaceable when he rode on to the next camp, and as he made the round of the northern outposts the fighting strain which had come down to him from his pioneer ancestors began to assert itself in spite of his efforts to control it. At every stopping-place Fitzpatrick's complaint was amplified. Depredations had followed each other with increasing frequency since Macpherson's death; and once, when one of the subcontractors had been provoked into resistance, arms had been used and a free fight had ensued.

Turning the matter over in his mind in growing indignation, Ballard had determined, by the time he had made the complete round of the outlying

camps, upon the course he should pursue. "I'll run a sheriff's posse in here and clean up the entire outfit; that's about what I'll do!" he was saying wrathfully to himself as he galloped eastward on the stage trail late in the afternoon of the final day. "The Lord knows I don't want to make a blood-feud of it, but if they will have it——"

The interruption was a little object-lesson illustrating the grievances of the contractors. Roughly paralleling the stage trail ran the line of the proposed southern lateral canal, marked by its double row of location stakes. At a turn in the road Ballard came suddenly upon what appeared to be an impromptu game of polo.

Flap-hatted herdsmen in shaggy overalls, and swinging long clubs in lieu of polo sticks, were riding in curious zigzags over the canal course, and bending for a drive at each right and left swerve of their wiry little mounts. It took the Kentuckian a full minute to master the intricacies of the game. Then he saw what was doing. The location stakes for the ditch boundaries were set opposite and alternate, and the object of the dodging riders was to determine which of them could club the greatest number of stakes out of the ground without missing a blow or drawing rein.

Ballard singled out the leader, a handsome, well-built *caballero*, with the face, figure, and

saddle-seat of the Cid, and rode into the thick of things, red wrath to the fore.

"Hi! you there!" he shouted. "Is your name Manuel?"

"*Si, Senor,*" was the mild reply; and the cavalier took off his bullion-corded sombrero and bowed to the saddle-horn.

"Well, mine is Ballard, and I am the chief engineer for the Arcadia Company."

"Ha! Señor Ballar', I am ver' much delight to meet you."

"Never mind that; the pleasure isn't mutual, by a damned sight. You tell your men to stop that monkey-business, and have them put those stakes back where they found them." Ballard was hot.

"You give-a the h-order in this valley, senor?" asked the Mexican softly.

"I do, where the company's property is concerned. Call your men off!"

"Señor Ballar', I have biffo to-day killed a man for that he spik to me like-a that!"

"Have you?" snorted Ballard contemptuously. "Well, you won't kill me. Call your men off, I say!"

There was no need. The makeshift polo game had paused, and the riders were gathering about the quarrelling two.

"Bat your left eye once, and we'll rope him for you, Manuel," said one.

"Wonder if I c'd knock a two-bagger with that hat o' his'n without mussin' his hair?" said another.

"Say, you fellers, wait a minute till I make that bronc' o' his'n do a cake-walk!" interposed a third, casting the loop of his riata on the ground so that Ballard's horse would be thrown if he lifted hoof.

It was an awkward crisis, and the engineer stood to come off with little credit. He was armed, but even in the unfettered cattle country one cannot pistol a laughing jeer. It was the saving sense of humour that came to his aid, banishing red wrath. There was no malice in the jeers.

"Sail in when you're ready, boys," he laughed. "I fight for my brand the same as you'd fight for yours. Those pegs have got to go back in the ground where you found them."

One of the flap-hatted riders dropped his reins, drummed with his elbows, and crowed lustily. The foreman backed his horse deftly out of the enclosing ring; and the man nearest to Ballard on the right made a little cast of his looped rope, designed to whip Ballard's pistol out of its holster. If the engineer had been the tenderfoot they took him for, the trouble would have culminated quickly.

With the laugh still on his lips, the Kentuckian

"Señor Ballar', I have biffo' to-day killed a man for that he spik to me like-a-that!"

was watching every move of the Mexican. There was bloodthirst, waiting only for the shadow of an excuse, glooming in the handsome black eyes. Ballard remembered Sanderson's fate, and a quick thrill of racial sympathy for the dead man tuned him to the fighting pitch. He knew he was confronting a treacherous bully of the type known to the West as a "killer"; a man whose regard for human life could be accurately and exactly measured by his chance for escaping the penalty for its taking.

It was at this climaxing moment, while Ballard was tightening his eye-hold upon the one dangerous antagonist, and foiling with his free hand the attempts of the playful "Scotty" at his right to disarm him, that the diversion came. A cloud of dust on the near-by stage trail resolved itself into a fiery-red, purring motor-car with a single occupant; and a moment later the car had left the road and was heading across the grassy interspace.

Manuel's left hand was hovering above his pistol-butt; and Ballard took his eyes from the menace long enough to glance aside at the approaching motorist. He was a kingly figure of a man well on in years, white-haired, ruddy of face, with huge military mustaches and a goatee. He brought the car with a skilful turn into the midst of things; and Ballard, confident now that the

Mexican foreman no longer needed watching, saw a singular happening.

While one might count two, the old man in the motor-car stared hard at him, rose in his place behind the steering-wheel, staggered, groped with his hands as the blind grope, and then fell back into the driving-seat with a groan.

Ballard was off his horse instantly, tendering his pocket-flask. But the old man's indisposition seemed to pass as suddenly as it had come.

"Thank you, suh," he said in a voice that boomed for its very depth and sweetness; "I reckon I've been driving a little too fast. Youh—youh name is Ballard—Breckenridge Ballard, isn't it?" he inquired courteously, completely ignoring the dissolving ring of practical jokers.

"It is. And you are Colonel Craigmiles?"

"At youh service, suh; entiahly at youh service. I should have known you anywhere for a Ballard. Youh mother was a Hardaway, but you don't take after that side. No, suh"—with calm deliberation—"you are youh father's son, Mistah Ballard." Then, as one coming at a bound from the remote past to the present: "Was thah any—ah—little discussion going on between you and—ah—Manuel, Mistuh Ballard?"

Five minutes earlier the engineer had been angry enough to prefer spiteful charges against the polo

players all and singular. But the booming of the deep voice had a curiously mollifying effect.

"It is hardly worth mentioning," he found himself replying. "I was protesting to your foreman because the boys were having a little game of polo at our expense—knocking our location stakes out of the ground."

The kingly old man in the motor-car drew himself up, and there was a mild explosion directed at the Mexican foreman.

"Manuel, I'm suhprised—right much suhprised and humiliated, suh! I thought it was—ah—distinctly undehstood that all this schoolboy triflin' was to be stopped. Let me heah no more of it. And see that these heah stakes are replaced; carefully replaced, if you please, suh." And then to the complainant: "I'm right sorry, I assure you, Mistuh Ballard. Let me prove it by carrying you off to dinneh with us at Castle 'Cadia. Grigsby, heah, will lead youh horse to camp, and fetch any little necessaries you might care to send for. Indulge me, suh, and let me make amends. My daughter speaks of you so often that I feel we ought to be mo' friendly."

Under much less favourable conditions it is conceivable that the Kentuckian would have overridden many barriers for the sake of finding the open door at Castle 'Cadia. And, the tour of in-

spection being completed, there was no special duty call to sound a warning.

"I shall be delighted, I'm sure," he burbled, quite like an infatuated lover; and when the cowboy messenger was charged with the errand to the headquarters camp, Ballard took his place beside the company's enemy, and the car was sent purring across to the hill-skirting stage road.

VIII

CASTLE 'CADIA

IT was a ten-mile run to the bowl-shaped valley behind the foot-hills; and Colonel Craigmiles, mindful, perhaps, of his late seizure, did not speed the motor-car.

Recalling it afterward, Ballard remembered that the talk was not once suffered to approach the conflict in which he and his host were the principal antagonists. Miss Elsa's house-party, the matchless climate of Arcadia, the scenery, Ballard's own recollections of his Kentucky boyhood—all these were made to do duty; and the colonel's smile was so winning, his deep voice so sympathetic, and his attitude so affectionately paternal, that Ballard found his mental picture of a fierce old frontiersman fighting for his squatter rights fading to the vanishing point.

"Diplomacy," Mr. Pelham had suggested; and Ballard smiled inwardly. If it came to a crossing of diplomatic weapons with this keen-eyed, gentle-voiced patriarch, who seemed bent on regarding

him as an honoured guest, the company's cause was as good as lost.

The road over which the motor-car was silently trundling avoided the headquarters camp at the dam by several miles, losing itself among the hog-back foot-hills well to the southward, and approaching the inner valley at right angles to the course of the river and the railway.

The sun had sunk behind the western mountain barrier and the dusk was gathering when the colonel quickened the pace, and the car topped the last of the hills in a staccato rush. Ballard heard the low thunder of the Boiling Water in its upper canyon, and had glimpses of weird shapes of eroded sandstone looming in huge pillars and fantastic mushroom figures in the growing darkness.

Then the lights of Castle 'Cadia twinkled in their tree-setting at the top of the little knoll; the drought-hardened road became a gravelled carriage-drive under the pneumatic tires; and a final burst of speed sent the car rocketing to the summit of the knoll through a maple-shadowed avenue.

The great tree-trunk-pillared portico of the country house was deserted when the colonel cut out the motor-battery switch at the carriage step. But a moment later a white-gowned figure appeared in the open doorway, and the colonel's

daughter came to the step, to laugh gayly, and to say:

"Why, Mr. Ballard, I'm astounded! Have you really decided that it is quite safe to trust yourself in the camp of the enemy?"

Ballard had seen Castle 'Cadia at field-glass range; and he had Bromley's enthusiastic description of the house of marvels to push anticipation some little distance along the way to meet the artistic reality. None the less, the reality came with the shock of the unexpected.

In the softened light of the shaded electric pendants, the massive pillars of the portico appeared as single trees standing as they had grown in the mountain forest. Underfoot the floor was of hewn tree-trunks; but the house walls, like the pillars, were of logs in the rough, cunningly matched and fitted to conceal the carpentry.

A man had come to take the automobile, and the colonel paused to call attention to a needed adjustment of the motor. Ballard made use of the isolated moment.

"I have accounted for you at last," he said, prolonging the greeting hand-clasp to the ultimate limit. "I know now what has made you what you are."

"Really?" she questioned lightly. "And all these years I have been vainly imagining that I

had acquired the manner of the civilized East! Isn't it pathetic?"

"Very," he agreed quite gravely. "But the pathos is all on my side."

"Meaning that I might let you go and dress for dinner? I shall. Enter the house of the enemy, Mr. Ballard. A cow-punching princess bids you welcome."

She was looking him fairly in the eyes when she said it, and he acquitted her doubtfully of the charge of intention. But her repetition, accidental or incidental, of his own phrase was sufficiently disconcerting to make him awkwardly silent while she led the way into the spacious reception-hall.

Here the spell of the enchantments laid fresh hold on him. The rustic exterior of the great house was only the artistically designed contrast—within were richness, refinement, and luxury unbounded. The floors were of polished wood, and the rugs were costly Daghestans. Beyond portières of curious Indian bead-work, there were vistas of harmonious interiors; carved furnishings, beamed and panelled ceilings, book-lined walls. The light everywhere came from the softly tinted electric globes. There was a great stone fireplace in the hall, but radiators flanked the openings, giving an added touch of modernity.

Ballard pulled himself together and strove to

recall the fifty-mile, sky-reaching mountain barrier lying between all this twentieth-century country-house luxury and the nearest outpost of urban civilisation. It asked for a tremendous effort; and the realising anchor dragged again when Miss Craigmiles summoned a Japanese servant and gave him in charge.

"Show Mr. Ballard to the red room, Tagawi," she directed. And then to the guest: "We dine at seven—as informally as you please. You will find your bag in your room, and Tagawi will serve you. As you once told me when I teased you in your Boston workshop—'If you don't see what you want, ask for it.'"

The Kentuckian followed his guide up the broad stair and through a second-floor corridor which abated no jot of the down-stair magnificence. Neither did his room, for that matter. Hangings of Pompeian red gave it its name; and it was spacious and high-studded, and critically up to date in its appointments.

The little brown serving-man deftly opened the bag brought by the colonel's messenger from Ballard's quarters at the Elbow Canyon camp, and laid out the guest's belongings. That done, he opened the door of the bath. "The honourable excellency will observe the hot water; also cold. Are the orders other for me?"

Ballard shook his head, dismissed the smiling little man, and turned on the water.

"I reckon I'd better take it cold," he said to himself; "then I'll know certainly whether I'm awake or dreaming. By Jove! but this place is a poem! I don't wonder that the colonel is fighting Berserk to save it alive. And Mr. Pelham and his millionaires come calmly up to the counter and offer to buy it—with mere money!"

He filled the porcelain bath with a crystal-clear flood that, measured by its icy temperature, might have been newly distilled glacier drip; and the cold plunge did something toward establishing the reality of things. But the incredibilities promptly reasserted themselves when he went down a little in advance of the house-party guests, and met Elsa, and was presented to a low-voiced lady with silvery hair and the face of a chastened saint, named to him as Miss Cauffrey, but addressed by Elsa as "Aunt June."

"I hope you find yourself somewhat refreshed, Mr. Ballard," said the sweet-voiced châtelaine. "Elsa tells me you have been in the tropics, and our high altitudes must be almost distressing at first; I know I found them so."

"Really, I hadn't noticed the change," returned Ballard rather vaguely. Then he bestirred himself, and tried to live up to the singularly out-of-

place social requirements. "I'm not altogether new to the altitudes, though I haven't been in the West for the past year or two. For that matter, I can't quite realise that I am in the West at this moment—at least in the uncitied part."

Miss Cauffrey smiled, and the king's daughter laughed softly.

"It does me so much good!" she declared, mocking him. "All through that dining-car dinner on the 'Overland Flyer' you were trying to reconcile me with the Western barbarities. Didn't you say something about being hopeful because I was aware of the existence of an America west of the Alleghanies?"

"Please let me down as easily as you can," pleaded the engineer. "You must remember that I am only a plain workingman."

"You are come to take poor Mr. Macpherson's place?" queried Miss Cauffrey; which was Ballard's first intimation that the Arcadian promotion scheme was not taboo by the entire household of Castle 'Cadia.

"That is what I supposed I was doing, up to this evening. But it seems that I have stumbled into fairyland instead."

"No," said the house-daughter, laughing at him again—"only into the least Arcadian part of Arcadia. And after dinner you will be free to go

where you are impatient to be at this very moment."

"I don't know about that," was Ballard's rejoinder. "I was just now wondering if I could be heroic enough to go contentedly from all this to my adobe shack in the construction camp."

Miss Craigmiles mocked him again.

"My window in the Alta Vista sleeper chanced to be open that night while the train was standing in the Denver station. Didn't I hear Mr. Pelham say that the watchword—your watchword—was to be 'drive,' for every man, minute, and dollar there was in it?"

Ballard said, "Oh, good Lord!" under his breath, and a hot flush rose to humiliate him, in spite of his efforts to keep it down. Now it was quite certain that her word of welcome was not a mere coincidence. She had overheard that brutal and uncalled-for boast of his about making love to "the cow-punching princesses"; and this was his punishment.

It was a moment for free speech of the explanatory sort, but Miss Cauffrey's presence forbade it. So he could only say, in a voice that might have melted a heart of stone: "I am wholly at your mercy—and I am your guest. You shouldn't step on a man when he's down. It isn't Christian."

Whether she would have stepped on him or not

was left a matter indeterminate, since the members of the house-party were coming down by twos and threes, and shortly afterward dinner was announced.

By this time Ballard was growing a little hardened to the surprises; and the exquisitely appointed dining-room evoked only a left-over thrill. And at dinner, in the intervals allowed him by Miss Dosia Van Bryck, who was his table companion, there were other things to think of. For example, he was curious to know if Wingfield's air of proprietorship in Miss Craigmiles would persist under Colonel Craigmiles's own roof.

Apparently it did persist. Before the first course was removed Ballard's curiosity was in the way of being amply satisfied; and he was saying "Yes" and "No" like a well-adjusted automaton to Miss Van Bryck.

In the seating he had Major Blacklock and one of the Cantrell girls for his opposites; and Lucius Bigelow and the other sharer of the common Cantrell Christian name widened the gap. But the centrepiece in the middle of the great mahogany was low; and Ballard could see over it only too well.

Wingfield and Elsa were discussing playmaking and the playmaker's art; or, rather, Wingfield was talking shop with cheerful dogmatism, and Miss

Craigmiles was listening; and if the rapt expression of her face meant anything. . . . Ballard lost himself in gloomy abstraction, and the colours of the electric spectrum suddenly merged for him into a greenish-gray.

"I should think your profession would be perfectly grand, Mr. Ballard. Don't you find it so?" Thus Miss Dosia, who, being quite void of subjective enthusiasm, felt constrained to try to evoke it in others.

"Very," said Ballard, hearing nothing save the upward inflection which demanded a reply.

Miss Van Bryck seemed mildly surprised; but after a time she tried again.

"Has any one told you that Mr. Wingfield is making the studies for a new play?" she asked.

Again Ballard marked the rising inflection; said "Yes," at a venture; and was straightway humiliated, as he deserved to be.

"It seems so odd that he should come out here for his material," Miss Van Bryck went on evenly. "I don't begin to understand how there can be any dramatic possibilities in a wilderness house-party, with positively no social setting whatever."

"Ah, no; of course not," stammered Ballard, realising now that he was fairly at sea. And then, to make matters as bad as they could be: "You were speaking of Mr. Wingfield?"

Miss Van Bryck's large blue eyes mirrored reproachful astonishment; but she was too placid and too good-natured to be genuinely piqued.

"I fear you must have had a hard day, Mr. Ballard. All this is very wearisome to you, isn't it?" she said, letting him have a glimpse of the real kindness underlying the inanities.

"My day has been rather strenuous," he confessed. "But you make me ashamed. Won't you be merciful and try me again?" And this time he knew what he was saying, and meant it.

"It is hardly worth repeating," she qualified—nevertheless, she did repeat it.

Ballard, listening now, found the little note of distress in the protest against play-building in the wilderness; and his heart warmed to Miss Dosia. In the sentimental field, disappointment for one commonly implies disappointment for two; and he became suddenly conscious of a fellow-feeling for the heiress of the Van Bryck millions.

"There is plenty of dramatic material in Arcadia for Mr. Wingfield, if he knows where to look for it," he submitted. "For example, our camp at the dam furnishes a 'situation' every now and then." And here he told the story of the catapulted stone, adding the little dash of mystery to give it the dramatic flavour.

Miss Dosia's interest was as eager as her limita-

tions would permit. "May I tell Mr. Wingfield?" she asked, with such innocent craft that Ballard could scarcely restrain a smile.

"Certainly. And if Mr. Wingfield is open to suggestion on that side, you may bring him down, and I'll put him on the trail of a lot more of the mysteries."

"Thank you so much. And may I call it *my* discovery?"

Again her obviousness touched the secret spring of laughter in him. It was very evident that Miss Van Bryck would do anything in reason to bring about a solution of continuity in the sympathetic intimacy growing up between the pair on the opposite side of the table.

"It is yours, absolutely," he made haste to say. "I should never have thought of the dramatic utility if you hadn't suggested it."

"H'm!—ha!" broke in the major. "What are you two young people plotting about over there?"

Ballard turned the edge of the query; blunted it permanently by attacking a piece of government engineering in which, as he happened to know, the major had figured in an advisory capacity. This carrying of the war into Africa brought on a battle technical which ran on unbroken to the ices and beyond; to the moment when Colonel Craigmiles proposed an adjournment to the portico

for the coffee and the tobacco. Ballard came off second-best, but he had accomplished his object, which was to make the shrewd-eyed old major forget if he had overheard too much; and Miss Van Bryck gave him his meed of praise.

"You are a very brave man, Mr. Ballard," she said, as he drew the portières aside for her. "Everybody else is afraid of the major."

"I've met him before," laughed the Kentuckian; "in one or another of his various incarnations. And I didn't learn my trade at West Point, you remember."

IX

THE BRINK OF HAZARD

THE summer night was perfect, and the after-dinner gathering under the great portico became rather a dispersal. The company fell apart into couples and groups when the coffee was served; and while Miss Craigmiles and the playwright were still fraying the worn threads of the dramatic unities, Ballard consoled himself with the older of the Cantrell girls, talking commonplace nothings until his heart ached.

Later on, when young Bigelow had relieved him, and he had given up all hope of breaking into the dramatic duet, he rose to go and make his parting acknowledgments to Miss Cauffrey and the colonel. It was at that moment that Miss Elsa confronted him.

"You are not leaving?" she said. "The evening is still young—even for country folk."

"Measuring by the hours I've been neglected, the evening is old, very old," he retorted reproachfully.

"Which is another way of saying that we have bored you until you are sleepy?" she countered. "But you mustn't go yet—I want to talk to you." And she wheeled a great wicker lounging-chair into a quiet corner, and beat up the pillows in a near-by hammock, and bade him smoke his pipe if he preferred it to the Castle 'Cadia cigars.

"I don't care to smoke anything if you will stay and talk to me," he said, love quickly blotting out the disappointments foregone.

"For this one time you may have both—your pipe and me. Are you obliged to go back to your camp to-night?"

"Yes, indeed. I ran away, as it was. Bromley will have it in for me for dodging him this way."

"Is Mr. Bromley your boss?"

"He is something much better—he is my friend."

Her hammock was swung diagonally across the quiet corner, and she arranged her pillows so that the shadow of a spreading potted palm came between her eyes and the nearest electric globe.

"Am I not your friend, too?" she asked.

Jerry Blacklock and the younger Miss Cantrell were pacing a slow sentry march up and down the open space in front of the lounging-chairs; and Ballard waited until they had made the turn and were safely out of ear-shot before he said: "There are times when I have to admit it, reluctantly."

"How ridiculous!" she scoffed. "What is finer than true friendship?"

"Love," he said simply.

"Cousin Janet will hear you," she warned. Then she mocked him, as was her custom. "Does that mean that you would like to have me tell you about Mr. Wingfield?"

He played trumps again.

"Yes. When is it to be?"

"How crudely elemental you are to-night! Suppose you ask him?"

"He hasn't given me the right."

"Oh. And I have?"

"You are trying to give it to me, aren't you?"

She was swinging gently in the hammock, one daintily booted foot touching the floor.

"You are so painfully direct at times," she complained. "It's like a cold shower-bath; invigorating, but shivery. Do you think Mr. Wingfield really cares anything for me? I don't. I think he regards me merely as so much literary material. He lives from moment to moment in the hope of discovering 'situations.'"

"Well,"—assentingly. "I am sure he has chosen a most promising subject—and surroundings. The kingdom of Arcadia reeks with dramatic possibilities, I should say."

Her face was still in the shadow of the branching

palm, but the changed tone betrayed her changed mood.

"I have often accused you of having no insight —no intuition," she said musingly. "Yet you have a way of groping blindly to the very heart of things. How could you know that it has come to be the chief object of my life to keep Mr. Wingfield from becoming interested in what you flippantly call 'the dramatic possibilities'?"

"I didn't know it," he returned.

"Of course you didn't. Yet it is true. It is one of the reasons why I gave up going with the Herbert Lassleys after my passage was actually booked on the *Carania*. Cousin Janet's party was made up. Dosia and Jerry Blacklock came down to the steamer to see us off. Dosia told me that Mr. Wingfield was included. You have often said that I have the courage of a man—I hadn't, then. I was horribly afraid."

"Of what?" he queried.

"Of many things. You would not understand if I should try to explain them."

"I do understand," he hastened to say. "But you have nothing to fear. Castle 'Cadia will merely gain an ally when Wingfield hears the story of the little war. Besides, I was not including your father's controversy with the Arcadia Company in the dramatic material; I was thinking

more particularly of the curious and unaccountable happenings that are continually occurring on the work—the accidents."

"There is no connection between the two—in your mind?" she asked. She was looking away from him, and he could not see her face. But the question was eager, almost pathetically eager.

"Assuredly not," he denied promptly. "Otherwise——"

"Otherwise you wouldn't be here to-night as my father's guest, you would say. But others are not as charitable. Mr. Macpherson was one of them. He charged all the trouble to us, though he could prove nothing. He said that if all the circumstances were made public—" She faced him quickly, and he saw that the beautiful eyes were full of trouble. "Can't you see what would happen—what is likely to happen if Mr. Wingfield sees fit to make literary material out of all these mysteries?"

The Kentuckian nodded. "The unthinking, newspaper-reading public would probably make one morsel of the accidents and your father's known antagonism to the company. But Wingfield would be something less than a man and a lover if he could bring himself to the point of making literary capital out of anything that might remotely involve you or your father."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"You don't understand the artistic temperament. It's a passion. I once heard Mr. Wingfield say that a true artist would make copy out of his grandmother."

Ballard scowled. It was quite credible that the Lester Wingfields were lost to all sense of the common decencies, but that Elsa Craigmiles should be in love with the sheik of the caddish tribe was quite beyond belief.

"I'll choke him off for you," he said; and his tone took its colour from the contemptuous underthought. "But I'm afraid I've already made a mess of it. To tell the truth, I suggested to Miss Van Bryck at dinner that our camp might be a good hunting-ground for Wingfield."

"*You said that to Dosia?*" There was something like suppressed horror in the low-spoken query.

"Not knowing any better, I did. She was speaking of Wingfield, and of the literary barrenness of house-parties in general. I mentioned the camp as an alternative—told her to bring him down, and I'd— Good heavens! what have I done?"

Even in the softened light of the electric globes he saw that her face had become a pallid mask of terror; that she was swaying in the hammock. He

was beside her instantly; and when she hid her face in her hands, his arm went about her for her comforting—this, though Wingfield was chatting amiably with Mrs. Van Bryck no more than three chairs away.

"Don't!" he begged. "I'll get out of it some way—lie out of it, fight out of it, if needful. I didn't know it meant anything to you. If I had—Elsa, dear, I love you; you've known it from the first. You can make believe with other men as you please, but in the end I shall claim you. Now tell me what it is that you want me to do."

Impulsively she caught at the caressing hand on her shoulder, kissed it, and pushed him away with resolute strength.

"You must never forget yourself again, dear friend—or make me forget," she said steadily. "And you must help me as you can. There is trouble—deeper trouble than you know or suspect. I tried to keep you out of it—away from it; and now you are here in Arcadia, to make it worse, infinitely worse. You have seen me laugh and talk with the others, playing the part of the woman you know. Yet there is never a waking moment when the burden of anxiety is lifted."

He mistook her meaning.

"You needn't be anxious about Wingfield's material hunt," he interposed. "If Miss Dosia

takes him to the camp, I'll see to it that he doesn't hear any of the ghost stories."

"That is only one of the anxieties," she went on hurriedly. "The greatest of them is—for you."

"For me? Because——"

"Because your way to Arcadia lay over three graves. That means nothing to you—does it also mean nothing that your life was imperilled within an hour of your arrival at your camp?"

He drew the big chair nearer to the hammock and sat down again.

"Now you are letting Bromley's imagination run away with yours. That rock came from our quarry. There was a night gang getting out stone for the dam."

She laid her hand softly on his knee.

"Do you want to know how much I trust you? That stone was thrown by a man who was standing upon the high bluff back of your headquarters. He thought you were alone in the office, and he meant to kill you. Don't ask me who it was, or how I know—I *do* know."

Ballard started involuntarily. It was not in human nature to take such an announcement calmly.

"Do you mean to say that I was coolly ambushed before I could——"

She silenced him with a quick little gesture.

Blacklock and Miss Cantrell were still pacing their sentry beat, and the major's "H'm—ha!" rose in irascible contradiction above the hum of voices.

"I have said all that I dare to say; more than I should have said if you were not so rashly determined to make light of things you do not understand," she rejoined evenly.

"They are things which I should understand—which I must understand if I am to deal intelligently with them," he insisted. "I have been calling them one part accident and three parts superstition or imagination. But if there is design——"

Again she stopped him with the imperative little gesture.

"I did not say there was design," she denied.

It was an *impasse*, and the silence which followed emphasised it. When he rose to take his leave, love prompted an offer of service, and he made it.

"I cannot help believing that you are mistaken," he qualified. "But I respect your anxiety so much that I would willingly share it if I could. What do you want me to do?"

She turned to look away down the maple-shadowed avenue and her answer had tears in it.

"I want you to be watchful—always watchful. I wish you to believe that your life is in peril, and

to act accordingly. And, lastly, I beg you to help me to keep Mr. Wingfield away from Elbow Canyon."

"I shall be heedful," he promised. "And if Mr. Wingfield comes material-hunting, I shall be as inhospitable as possible. May I come again to Castle 'Cadia?"

The invitation was given instantly, almost eagerly.

"Yes; come as often as you can spare the time. Must you go now? Shall I have Otto bring the car and drive you around to your camp?"

Ballard promptly refused to put the chauffeur to the trouble. It was only a little more than a mile in the direct line from the house on the knoll to the point where the river broke through the foothill hogback, and the night was fine and starlit. After the day of hard riding he should enjoy the walk.

Elsa did not go with him when he went to say good-night to Miss Cauffrey and to his host. He left her sitting in the hammock, and found her still there a few minutes later when he came back to say that he must make his acknowledgments to her father through her. "I can't find him, and no one seems to know where he is," he explained.

She rose quickly and went to the end of the portico to look down a second tree-shadowed

avenue skirting the mountainward slope of the knoll.

"He must have gone to the laboratory; the lights are on," she said; and then with a smile that thrilled him ecstatically: "You see what your footing is to be at Castle 'Cadia. Father will not make company of you; he expects you to come and go as one of us."

With this heart-warming word for his leave-taking Ballard sought out the path to which she directed him and swung off down the hill to find the trail, half bridle-path and half waggon road, which led by way of the river's windings to the outlet canyon and the camp on the outer mesa.

When he was but a little distance from the house he heard the *pad pad* of soft footfalls behind him, and presently a great dog of the St. Bernard breed overtook him and walked sedately at his side. Ballard loved a good dog only less than he loved a good horse, and he stopped to pat the St. Bernard, talking to it as he might have talked to a human being.

Afterward, when he went on, the dog kept even pace with him, and would not go back, though Ballard tried to send him, coaxing first and then commanding. To the blandishments the big retriever made his return in kind, wagging his tail and thrusting his huge head between Ballard's

knees in token of affection and loyal fealty. To the commands he was entirely deaf, and when Ballard desisted, the dog took his place at one side and one step in advance, as if half impatient at his temporary master's waste of time.

At the foot-bridge crossing the river the dog ran ahead and came back again, much as if he were a scout pioneering the way; and at Ballard's "Good dog! Fine old fellow!" he padded along with still graver dignity, once more catching the step in advance and looking neither to right nor left.

At another time Ballard might have wondered why the great St. Bernard, most sagacious of his tribe, should thus attach himself to a stranger and refuse to be shaken off. But at the moment the young man had a heartful of other and more insistent queryings. Gained ground with the loved one is always the lover's most heady cup of intoxication; but the lees at the bottom of the present cup were sharply tonic, if not bitter.

What was the mystery so evidently enshrouding the tragedies at Elbow Canyon? That they were tragedies rather than accidents there seemed no longer any reasonable doubt. But with the doubt removed the mystery cloud grew instantly thicker and more impenetrable. If the tragedies were growing out of the fight for the possession of Arcadia Park, what manner of man could Colonel

Craigmiles be to play the kindly, courteous host at one moment and the backer and instigator of murderers at the next? And if the charge against the colonel be allowed to stand, it immediately dragged in a sequent which was clearly inadmissible: the unavoidable inference being that Elsa Craigmiles was in no uncertain sense her father's accessory.

Ballard was a man and a lover; and his first definition of love was unquestioning loyalty. He was prepared to doubt the evidence of his senses, if need be, but not the perfections of the ideal he had set up in the inner chamber of his heart, naming it Elsa Craigmiles.

These communings and queryings, leading always into the same metaphysical labyrinth, brought the young engineer far on the down-river trail; were still with him when the trail narrowed to a steep one-man path and began to climb the hogback, with one side buttressed by a low cliff and the other falling sheer into the Boiling Water on the left. On this narrow ledge the dog went soberly ahead; and at one of the turns in the path Ballard came upon him standing solidly across the way and effectually blocking it.

"What is it, old boy?" was the man's query; and the dog's answer was a wag of the tail and a low whine. "Go on, old fellow," said Ballard; but the big St. Bernard merely braced himself and

whined again. It was quite dark on the high ledge, a fringe of scrub pines on the upper side of the cutting blotting out a fair half of the starlight. Ballard struck a match and looked beyond the dog; looked and drew back with a startled exclamation. Where the continuation of the path should have been there was a gaping chasm pitching steeply down into the Boiling Water.

More lighted matches served to show the extent of the hazard and the trap-like peril of it. A considerable section of the path had slid away in a land- or rock-slide, and Ballard saw how he might easily have walked into the gulf if the dog had not stopped on the brink of it.

"I owe you one, good old boy," he said, stooping to pat the words out on the St. Bernard's head. "I'll pay it when I can; to you, to your mistress, or possibly even to your master. Come on, old fellow, and we'll find another way with less risk in it," and he turned back to climb over the mesa hill under the stone quarries, approaching the headquarters camp from the rear.

When the hill was surmounted and the electric mast lights of the camp lay below, the great dog stopped, sniffing the air suspiciously.

"Don't like the looks of it, do you?" said Ballard. "Well, I guess you'd better go back home. It isn't a very comfortable place down there for

little dogs—or big ones. Good-night, old fellow." And, quite as if he understood, the St. Bernard faced about and trotted away toward Castle 'Cadia.

There was a light in the adobe shack when Ballard descended the hill, and he found Bromley sitting up for him. The first assistant engineer was killing time by working on the current estimate for the quarry subcontractor, and he looked up quizzically when his chief came in.

"Been bearding the lion in his den, have you?" he said, cheerfully. "That's right; there's nothing like being neighbourly, even with our friend the enemy. Didn't you find him all the things I said he was—and then some?"

"Yes," returned Ballard, gravely. Then, abruptly: "Loudon, who uses the path that goes up on our side of the canyon and over into the Castle 'Cadia valley?"

"Who?—why, anybody having occasion to. It's the easiest way to reach the wing dam that Sanderson built at the canyon inlet to turn the current against the right bank. Fitzpatrick sends a man over now and then to clear the driftwood from the dam."

"Anybody been over to-day?"

"No."

"How about the cow-puncher—Grigsby—who brought my horse over and got my bag?"

"He was riding, and he came and went by way of our bridge below the dam. You couldn't ride a horse over that hill path."

"You certainly could not," said Ballard grimly. "There is a chunk about the size of this shack gone out of it—dropped into the river, I suppose."

Bromley was frowning reflectively.

"More accidents?" he suggested.

"One more—apparently."

Bromley jumped up, sudden realization grappling him.

"Why, Breckenridge!—you've just come over that path—alone, and in the dark!"

"Part way over it, and in the dark, yes; but not alone, luckily. The Craigmiles's dog—the big St. Bernard—was with me, and he stopped on the edge of the break. Otherwise I might have walked into it—most probably should have walked into it."

Bromley began to tramp the floor with his hands in his pockets.

"I can't remember," he said; and again, "I can't remember. I was over there yesterday, or the day before. It was all right then. It was a good trail. Why, Breckenridge"—with sudden emphasis—"it would have taken a charge of dynamite to blow it down!"

Ballard dropped lazily into a chair and locked

his hands at the back of his head. "And you say that the hoodoo hasn't got around to using high explosives yet, eh? By the way, have there been any more visitations since I went out on the line last Tuesday?"

Bromley was shaking his head in the negative when the door opened with a jerk and Bessinger, the telegraph operator whose wire was in the railroad yard office, tumbled in, white faced.

"Hoskins and the Two!" he gasped. "They're piled up under a material train three miles down the track! Fitzpatrick is turning out a wrecking crew from the bunk shanties, and he sent me up to call you!"

Bromley's quick glance aside for Ballard was acutely significant.

"I guess I'd better change that 'No' of mine to a qualified 'Yes,'" he corrected. "The visitation seems to have come." Then to Bessinger: "Get your breath, Billy, and then chase back to Fitzpatrick. Tell him we'll be with him as soon as Mr. Ballard can change his clothes."

X

HOSKINS'S GHOST

THE wreck in the rocky hills west of the Elbow Canyon railroad yard proved to be less calamitous than Bessinger's report, handed on from the excited alarm brought in by a demoralized train flagman, had pictured it. When Ballard and Bromley, hastening to the rescue on Fitzpatrick's relief train, reached the scene of the accident, they found Hoskins's engine and fifteen cars in the ditch, and the second flagman with a broken arm; but Hoskins himself was unhurt, as were the remaining members of the train crew.

Turning the work of track clearing over to Bromley and the relief crew, Ballard began at once to pry irritably into causes; irritably since wrecks meant delays, and President Pelham's letters were already cracking the whip for greater expedition.

It was a singular derailment, and at first none of the trainmen seemed to be able to account for it. The point of disaster was on a sharp curve

where the narrow-gauge track bent like a strained bow around one of the rocky hills. As the débris lay, the train seemed to have broken in two on the knuckle of the curve, and here the singularity was emphasised. The overturned cars were not merely derailed; they were locked and crushed together, and heaped up and strewn abroad, in a fashion to indicate a collision rather than a simple jumping of the track.

Ballard used Galliford, the train conductor, for the first heel of his pry.

"I guess you and Hoskins both need about thirty days," was the way he opened upon Galliford. "How long had your train been broken in two before the two sections came in collision?"

"If we was broke in two, nobody knew it. I was in the caboose 'lookout' myself, and I saw the Two's gauge-light track around the curve. Next I knew, I was smashin' the glass in the 'lookout' with my head, and the train was chasin' out on the prairie. I'll take the thirty days, all right, and I won't sue the company for the cuts on my head. But I'll be danged if I'll take the blame, Mr. Ballard." The conductor spoke as a man.

"Somebody's got to take it," snapped the chief. "If you didn't break in two, what did happen?"

"Now you've got me guessing, and I hain't got any more guesses left. At first I thought Hoskins

had hit something 'round on the far side o' the curve. That's what it felt like. Then, for a second or two, I could have sworn he had the Two in the reverse, backing his end of the train up against my end and out into the sage-brush."

"What does Hoskins say? Where is he?" demanded Ballard; and together they picked their way around to the other end of the wreck, looking for the engineman.

Hoskins, however, was not to be found. Fitzpatrick had seen him groping about in the cab of his overturned engine; and Bromley, when the inquiry reached him, explained that he had sent Hoskins up to camp on a hand-car which was going back for tools.

"He was pretty badly shaken up, and I told him he'd better hunt the bunk shanty and rest his nerves awhile. We didn't need him," said the assistant, accounting for the engineman's disappearance.

Ballard let the investigation rest for the moment, but later, when Bromley was working the contractor's gang on the track obstructions farther along, he lighted a flare torch at the fire some of the men had made out of the wreck kindling wood, and began a critical examination of the derailed and débris-covered locomotive.

It was a Baldwin ten-wheel type, with the boiler

extending rather more than half-way through the cab, and since it had rolled over on the right-hand side, the controlling levers were under the crushed wreckage of the cab. None the less, Ballard saw what he was looking for; afterward making assurance doubly sure by prying at the engine's brake-shoes and thrusting the pinch-bar of inquiry into various mechanisms under the trucks and driving-wheels.

It was an hour past midnight when Bromley reported the track clear, and asked if the volunteer wrecking crew should go on and try to pick up the cripples.

"Not to-night," was Ballard's decision. "We'll get Williams and his track-layers in from the front to-morrow and let them tackle it. Williams used to be Upham's wrecking boss over on the D. & U. P. main line, and he'll make short work of this little pile-up, engine and all."

Accordingly, the whistle of the relief train's engine was blown to recall Fitzpatrick's men, and a little later the string of flats, men-laden, trailed away among the up-river hills, leaving the scene of the disaster with only the dull red glow of the workmen's night fire to illuminate it.

When the rumble of the receding relief train was no longer audible, the figure of a man, dimly outlined in the dusky glow of the fire, materialised

out of the shadows of the nearest arroyo. First making sure that no watchman had been left to guard the point of hazard, the man groped purposefully under the fallen locomotive and drew forth a stout steel bar which had evidently been hidden for this later finding. With this bar for a lever, the lone wrecker fell fiercely at work under the broken cab, prying and heaving until the sweat started in great drops under the visor of his workman's cap and ran down to make rivulets of gray in the grime on his face.

Whatever he was trying to do seemed difficult of accomplishment, if not impossible. Again and again he strove at his task, pausing now and then to take breath or to rub his moist hands in the dry sand for the better gripping of the smooth steel. Finally—it was when the embers of the fire on the hill slope were flickering to their extinction—the bar slipped and let him down heavily. The fall must have partly stunned him, since it was some little time before he staggered to his feet, flung the bar into the wreck with a morose oath, and limped away up the track toward the headquarters camp, turning once and again to shake his fist at the capsized locomotive in the ditch at the curve.

It was in the afternoon of the day following the wreck that Ballard made the laboratory test for

blame; the office room in the adobe shack serving as the "sweat-box."

First came the flagmen, one at a time, their stories agreeing well enough, and both corroborating Galliford's account. Next came Hoskins's fireman, a green boy from the Alta Vista mines, who had been making his first trip over the road. He knew nothing save that he had looked up between shovelfuls to see Hoskins fighting with his levers, and had judged the time to be ripe for the life-saving jump.

Last of all came Hoskins, hanging his head and looking as if he had been caught stealing sheep.

"Tell it straight," was Ballard's curt caution; and the engineman stumbled through a recital in which haziness and inconsistency struggled for first place. He had seen something on the track or he thought he had, and had tried to stop. Before he could bring the train under control he had heard the crashing of the wreck in the rear. He admitted that he had jumped while the engine was still in motion.

"Which way was she running when you jumped, John?—forward or backward?" asked Ballard, quietly.

Bromley, who was making pencil notes of the evidence, looked up quickly and saw the big engineman's jaw drop.

"How could she be runnin' any way but forrards?" he returned, sullenly.

Ballard was smoking, and he shifted his cigar to say: "I didn't know." Then, with sudden heat: "But I mean to know, Hoskins; I mean to go quite to the bottom of this, here and now! You've been garbling the facts; purposely, or because you are still too badly rattled to know what you are talking about. I can tell you what you did: for some reason you made an emergency stop; you *did* make it, either with the brakes or without them. Then you put your engine in the reverse motion and *backed;* you were backing when you jumped, and the engine was still backing when it left the rails."

Hoskins put his shoulders against the wall and passed from sullenness to deep dejection. "I've got a wife and two kids back in Alta Vista, and I'm all in," he said. "What is there about it that you don't know, Mr. Ballard?"

"There are two or three other things that I do know, and one that I don't. You didn't come up to the camp on the hand-car last night; and after we left the wreck, somebody dug around in the Two's cab trying to fix things so that they would look a little better for John Hoskins. So much I found out this morning. But I don't care particularly about that: what I want to know is the first cause. What made you lose your head?"

"I told you; there was something on the track."

"What was it?"

"It was—well, it was what once was a man."

Ballard bit hard on his cigar, and all the phrases presenting themselves were profane. But a glance from Bromley enabled him to say, with decent self-control: "Go on; tell us about it."

"There ain't much to tell, and I reckon you won't believe a thing 'at I say," Hoskins began monotonously. "Did you or Mr. Bromley notice what bend o' the river that curve is at?"

Ballard said "No," and Bromley shook his head. The engineman went on.

"It's where *he* fell in and got drownded—Mr. Braithwaite, I mean. I reckon it sounds mighty foolish to you-all, sittin' here in the good old daylight, with nothin' happening: but I *saw* him. When the Two's headlight jerked around the curve and picked him up, he was standing between the rails, sideways, and lookin' off toward the river. He had the same little old two-peaked cap on that he always wore, and he had his fishin'-rod over his shoulder. I didn't have three car lengths to the good when I saw him; and—and—well, I reckon I went plumb crazy." Hoskins was a large man and muscular rather than fat; but he was sweating again, and could not hold his hands still.

Ballard got up and walked to the window which

looked out upon the stone yard. When he turned again it was to ask Hoskins, quite mildly, if he believed in ghosts.

"I never allowed to, before this, Mr. Ballard."

"Yet you have often thought of Braithwaite's drowning, when you have been rounding that particular curve? I remember you pointed out the place to me."

Hoskins nodded. "I reckon I never have run by there since without thinking of it."

Ballard sat down again and tilted his chair to the reflective angle.

"One more question, John, and then you may go. You had a two-hour lay-over in Alta Vista yesterday while the D. & U. P. people were transferring your freight. How many drinks did you take in those two hours?"

"Before God, Mr. Ballard, I never touched a drop! I don't say I'm too good to do it: I ain't. But any man that'd go crookin' his elbow when he had that mountain run ahead of him would be *all* fool!"

"That's so," said Ballard. And then: "That will do. Go and turn in again and sleep the clock around. I'll tell you what is going to happen to you when you're better fit to hear it."

"Well?" queried Bromley, when Hoskins was gone.

"Say your say, and then I'll say mine," was Ballard's rejoinder.

"I should call it a pretty harsh joke on Hoskins, played by somebody with more spite than common sense. There has been some little ill blood between Fitzpatrick's men and the railroad gangs; more particularly between the stone-cutters here at the dam and the train crews. It grew out of Fitzpatrick's order putting his men on the water-wagon. When the camp canteen was closed, the stone 'buckies' tried to open up a jug-line from Alta Vista. The trainmen wouldn't stand for it against Macpherson's promise to fire the first 'boot-legger' he caught."

"And you think one of the stone-cutters went down from the camp to give Hoskins a jolt?"

"That is my guess."

Ballard laughed.

"Mine isn't quite as practical, I'll admit; but I believe it is the right one. I've been probing Hoskins's record quietly, and his long suit is superstition. Half the 'hoodoo' talk of the camp can be traced back to him if you'll take the trouble. He confessed just now that he never passed that point in the road without thinking of Braithwaite and his taking-off. From that to seeing things isn't a very long step."

Bromley made the sign of acquiescence.

"I'd rather accept your hypothesis than mine, Breckenridge. I'd hate to believe that we have the other kind of a fool on the job; a man who would deliberately make scare medicine to add to that which is already made. What will you do with Hoskins?"

"Let him work in the repair shop for a while, till he gets the fever out of his blood. I don't want to discharge him."

"Good. Now that is settled, will you take a little walk with me? I want to show you something."

Ballard found his pipe and filled it, and they went out together. It was a perfect summer afternoon, still and cloudless, and with the peculiar high-mountain resonance in the air that made the clink of the stone hammers ring like a musical chorus beaten out upon steel anvils. Peaceful, orderly industry struck the key-note, and for the moment there were no discords. Out on the great ramparts of the dam the masons were swinging block after block of the face wall into place, and the *burr-r* and cog-chatter of the huge derrick hoisting gear were incessant. Back of the masonry the concrete mixers poured their viscous charges into the forms, and the puddlers walked back and forth on their stagings, tamping the plastic material into the network of metal bars binding the mass with the added strength of steel.

Bromley led the way through the stone-yard activities and around the quarry hill to the path notched in the steep slope of the canyon side. The second turn brought them to the gap made by the land-slide. It was a curious breach, abrupt and clean-cut; its shape and depth suggesting the effect of a mighty hammer blow scoring its groove from the path level to the river's edge. The material was a compact yellow shale, showing no signs of disintegration elsewhere.

"What's your notion, Loudon?" said Ballard, when they were standing on the edge of the newly made gash.

Bromley wagged his head doubtfully.

"I'm not so sure of it now as I thought I was when I came up here this morning. Do you see that black streak out there on the shale, just about at the path level? A few hours ago I could have sworn it was a powder burn; the streak left by a burning fuse. It doesn't look so much like it now, I'll confess."

"You've 'got 'em' about as bad as Hoskins has," laughed Ballard. "A dynamite charge that would account for this would advertise itself pretty loudly in a live camp five hundred yards away. Besides, it would have had to be drilled before it could be shot, and the drill-holes would show up—as they don't."

"Yes," was the reply; "I grant you the drill-holes. I guess I have 'got 'em,' as you say. But the bang wouldn't count. Quinlan let off half a dozen blasts in the quarry at quitting time yesterday, and one jar more or less just at that time wouldn't have been noticed."

Ballard put his arm across the theorist's shoulders and faced him about to front the down-canyon industries.

"You mustn't let this mystery-smoke get into your nostrils, Loudon, boy," he said. "Whatever happens, there must always be two cool heads and two sets of steady nerves on this job—yours and mine. Now let's go down the railroad on the push-car and see how Williams is getting along with his pick-up stunt. He ought to have the Two standing on her feet by this time."

XI

GUN PLAY

THREE days after the wreck in the Lava Hills, Ballard was again making the round of the outpost camps in the western end of the valley, verifying grade lines, re-establishing data stakes lost, or destroyed by the Craigmiles range riders, hustling the ditch diggers, and, incidentally, playing host to young Lucius Bigelow, the Forestry Service member of Miss Elsa's house-party.

Bigelow's inclusion as a guest on the inspection gallop had been planned, not by his temporary host, but by Miss Elsa herself. Mr. Bigelow's time was his own, she had explained in her note to Ballard, but he was sufficiently an enthusiast in his chosen profession to wish to combine a field study of the Arcadian watersheds with the pleasures of a summer outing. If Mr. Ballard would be so kind . . . and all the other fitting phrases in which my lady begs the boon she may strictly require at the hands of the man who has said the talismanic words, "I love you."

As he was constrained to be, Ballard was punctiliously hospitable to the quiet, self-contained young man who rode an entire day at his pacesetter's side without uttering a dozen words on his own initiative. The hospitality was purely dutiful at first; but later Bigelow earned it fairly. Making no advances on his own part, the guest responded generously when Ballard drew him out; and behind the mask of thoughtful reticence the Kentuckian discovered a man of stature, gentle of speech, simple of heart, and a past-master of the wood- and plains-craft that a constructing engineer, however broad-minded, can acquire only as his work demands it.

"You gentlemen of the tree bureau can certainly give us points on ordinary common sense, Mr. Bigelow," Ballard admitted on this, the third day out, when the student of natural conditions had called attention to the recklessness of the contractors in cutting down an entire forest of slope-protecting young pines to make trestle-bents for a gulch flume. "I am afraid I should have done precisely what Richards has done here: taken the first and most convenient timber I could lay hands on."

"That is the point of view the Forestry Service is trying to modify," rejoined Bigelow, mildly. "To the average American, educated or ignorant,

wood seems the cheapest material in a world of plenty. Yet I venture to say that in this present instance your company could better have afforded almost any other material for those trestle-bents. That slope will make you pay high for its stripping before you can grow another forest to check the flood wash."

"Of course it will; that says itself, now that you have pointed it out," Ballard agreed. "Luckily, the present plans of the company don't call for much flume timber; I say 'luckily,' because I don't like to do violence to my convictions, when I'm happy enough to have any."

Bigelow's grave smile came and went like the momentary glow from some inner light of prescience.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, you are a man of very strong convictions, Mr. Ballard," he ventured to say.

"Think so? I don't know. A fair knowledge of my trade, a few opinions, and a certain pigheaded stubbornness that doesn't know when it is beaten: shake these up together and you have the compound which has misled you. I'm afraid I don't often wait for convincement—of the purely philosophical brand."

They were riding together down the line of the northern lateral canal, with Bourke Fitzpatrick's

new headquarters in the field for the prospective night's bivouac. The contractor's camp, a disorderly blot of shanties and well-weathered tents on the fair grass-land landscape, came in sight just as the sun was sinking below the Elks, and Ballard quickened the pace.

"You'll be ready to quit for the day when we get in, won't you?" he said to Bigelow, when the broncos came neck and neck in the scurry for the hay racks.

"Oh, I'm fit enough, by now," was the ready rejoinder. "It was only the first day that got on my nerves."

There was a rough-and-ready welcome awaiting the chief engineer and his guest when they drew rein before Fitzpatrick's commissary; and a supper of the void-filling sort was quickly set before them in the back room of the contractor's quarters. But there was trouble in the air. Ballard saw that Fitzpatrick was cruelly hampered by the presence of Bigelow; and when the meal was finished he gave the contractor his chance in the privacy of the little cramped pay-office.

"What is it, Bourke?" he asked, when the closed door cut them off from the Forest Service man.

Fitzpatrick was shaking his head. "It's a blood feud now, Mr. Ballard. Gallagher's gang—all

Irishmen—went up against four of the colonel's men early this morning. The b'ys took shelter in the ditch, and the cow-punchers tried to run 'em out. Some of our teamsters were armed, and one of the Craigmiles men was killed or wounded—we don't know which: the others picked him up and carried him off."

Ballard's eyes narrowed under his thoughtful frown.

"I've been afraid it would come to that, sooner or later," he said slowly. Then he added: "We ought to be able to stop it. The colonel seems to deprecate the scrapping part of it as much as we do."

Fitzpatrick's exclamation was of impatient disbelief. "Any time he'll hold up his little finger, Mr. Ballard, this monkey-business will go out like a squib fuse in a wet hole! He isn't wanting to stop it."

Ballard became reflective again, and hazarded another guess.

"Perhaps the object-lesson of this morning will have a good effect. A chance shot has figured as a peacemaker before this."

"Don't you believe it's going to work that way this time!" was the earnest protest. "If the Craigmiles outfit doesn't whirl in and shoot up this camp before to-morrow morning, I'm missing my guess."

Ballard rapped the ashes from his briar, and refilled and lighted it. When the tobacco was glowing in the bowl, he said, quite decisively: "In that case, we'll try to give them what they are needing. Are you picketed?"

"No."

"See to it at once. Make a corral of the waggons and scrapers and get the stock inside of it. Then put out a line of sentries, with relays to relieve the men every two hours. We needn't be taken by surprise, whatever happens."

Fitzpatrick jerked a thumb toward the outer room where Bigelow was smoking his after-supper pipe.

"How about your friend?" he asked.

At the query Ballard realised that the presence of the Forest Service man was rather unfortunate. Constructively his own guest, Bigelow was really the guest of Colonel Craigmiles; and the position of a neutral in any war is always a difficult one.

"Mr. Bigelow is a member of the house-party at Castle 'Cadia," he said, in reply to the contractor's doubtful question. "But I can answer for his discretion. I'll tell him what he ought to know, and he may do as he pleases."

Following out the pointing of his own suggestion, Ballard gave Bigelow a brief outline of the Arcadian conflict while Fitzpatrick was posting the

sentries. The Government man made no comment, save to say that it was a most unhappy situation; but when Ballard offered to show him to his quarters for the night, he protested at once.

"No, indeed, Mr. Ballard," he said, quite heartily, for him; "you mustn't leave me out that way. At the worst, you may be sure that I stand for law and order. I have heard something of this fight between your company and the colonel, and while I can't pretend to pass upon the merits of it, I don't propose to go to bed and let you stand guard over me."

"All right, and thank you," laughed Ballard; and together they went out to help Fitzpatrick with his preliminaries for the camp defence.

This was between eight and nine o'clock; and by ten the stock was corralled within the line of shacks and tents, a cordon of watchers had been stretched around the camp, and the greater number of Fitzpatrick's men were asleep in the bunk tents and shanties.

The first change of sentries was made at midnight, and Ballard and Bigelow both walked the rounds with Fitzpatrick. Peace and quietness reigned supreme. The stillness of the beautiful summer night was undisturbed, and the roundsmen found a good half of the sentinels asleep at their posts. Ballard was disposed to make light

of Fitzpatrick's fears, and the contractor took it rather hard.

"I know 'tis all hearsay with you, yet, Mr. Ballard; you haven't been up against it," he protested, when the three of them were back at the camp-fire which was burning in front of the commissary. "But if you had been scrapping with these devils for the better part of two years, as we have——"

The interruption was a sudden quaking tremor of earth and atmosphere followed by a succession of shocks like the quick firing of a battleship squadron. A sucking draught of wind swept through the camp, and the fire leaped up as from the blast of an underground bellows. Instantly the open spaces of the headquarters were alive with men tumbling from their bunks; and into the thick of the confusion rushed the lately posted sentries.

For a few minutes the turmoil threatened to become a panic, but Fitzpatrick and a handful of the cooler-headed gang bosses got it under, the more easily since there was no attack to follow the explosions. Then came a cautious reconnaissance in force down the line of the canal in the direction of the earthquake, and a short quarter of a mile below the camp the scouting detachment reached the scene of destruction.

The raiders had chosen their ground carefully. At a point where the canal cutting passed through the shoulder of a hill they had planted charges of dynamite deep in the clay of the upper hillside. The explosions had started a land-slide, and the patient digging work of weeks had been obliterated in a moment.

Ballard said little. Fitzpatrick was on the ground to do the swearing, and the money loss was his, if Mr. Pelham's company chose to make him stand it. What Celtic rage could compass in the matter of cursings was not lacking; and at the finish of the outburst there was an appeal, vigorous and forceful.

"You're the boss, Mr. Ballard, and 'tis for you to say whether we throw up this job and quit, or give these blank, blank imps iv hell what's comin' to 'em!" was the form the appeal took; and the new chief accepted the challenge promptly.

"What are your means of communication with the towns in the Gunnison valley?" he asked abruptly.

Fitzpatrick pulled himself down from the rage heights and made shift to answer as a man.

"There's a bridle trail down the canyon to Jack's Cabin; and from that on you hit the railroad."

"And the distance to Jack's Cabin?"

"Twenty-five miles, good and strong, by the canyon crookings; but only about half of it is bad going."

"Is there anybody in your camp who knows the trail?"

"Yes. Dick Carson, the water-boy."

"Good. We'll go back with you, and you'll let me have the boy and two of your freshest horses."

"You'll not be riding that trail in the dark, Mr. Ballard! It's a fright, even in daylight."

"That's my affair," said the engineer, curtly. "If your boy can find the trail, I'll ride it."

That settled it for the moment, and the scouting party made its way up to the headquarters to carry the news of the landslide. Bigelow walked in silence beside his temporary host, saying nothing until after they had reached camp, and Fitzpatrick had gone to assemble the horses and the guide. Then he said, quite as if it were a matter of course:

"I'm going with you, Mr. Ballard, if you don't object."

Ballard did object, pointedly and emphatically, making the most of the night ride and the hazardous trail. When these failed to discourage the young man from Washington, the greater objection came out baldly.

"You owe it to your earlier host to ride back to Castle 'Cadia from here, Mr. Bigelow. I'm going

to declare war, and you can't afford to identify yourself with me," was the way Ballard put it; but Bigelow only smiled and shook his head.

"I'm not to be shunted quite so easily," he said. "Unless you'll say outright that I'll be a butt-in, I'm going with you."

"All right; if it's the thing you want to do," Ballard yielded. "Of course, I shall be delighted to have you along." And when Fitzpatrick came with two horses he sent him back to the corral for a third.

The preparations for the night ride were soon made, and it was not until Ballard and Bigelow were making ready to mount at the door of the commissary that Fitzpatrick reappeared with the guide, a grave-faced lad who looked as if he might be years older than any guess his diminutive stature warranted. Ballard's glance was an eye-sweep of shrewd appraisal.

"You're not much bigger than a pint of cider, Dickie boy," he commented. "Why don't you take a start and grow some?"

"I'm layin' off to; when I get time. Pap allows I got to 'r he won't own to me," said the boy soberly.

"Who is your father?" The query was a mere fill-in, bridging the momentary pause while Ballard was inspecting the saddle cinchings of the

horse he was to ride; and evidently the boy so regarded it.

"He's a man," he answered briefly, adding nothing to the supposable fact.

Bigelow was up, and Ballard was putting a leg over his wiry little mount when Fitzpatrick emerged from the dimly lighted interior of the commissary bearing arms—a pair of short-barrelled repeating rifles in saddle-holsters.

"Better be slinging these under the stirrup-leathers—you and your friend, Mr. Ballard," he suggested. "All sorts of things are liable to get up in the tall hills when a man hasn't got a gun."

This was so patently said for the benefit of the little circle of onlooking workmen that Ballard bent to the saddle-horn while Fitzpatrick was buckling the rifle-holster in place.

"What is it, Bourke?" he asked quietly.

"More of the same," returned the contractor, matching the low tone of the inquiry. "Craigmiles has got his spies in every camp, and you're probably spotted, same as old man Macpherson used to be when he rode the work. If that cussed Mexican foreman does be getting wind of this, and shy a guess at why you're heading for Jack's Cabin and the railroad in the dead o' night——"

Ballard's exclamation was impatient.

"This thing has got on your digestion, Bourke,"

he said, rallying the big contractor. "Up at the Elbow Canyon camp it's a hoodoo bogey, and down here it's the Craigmiles cow-boys. Keep your shirt on, and we'll stop it—stop it short." Then, lowering his voice again: "Is the boy trustworthy?"

Fitzpatrick's shrug was more French than Irish.

"He can show you the trail; and he hates the Craigmiles outfit as the devil hates holy water. His father was a 'rustler,' and the colonel got him sent over the road for cattle-stealing. Dick comes of pretty tough stock, but I guess he'll do you right."

Ballard nodded, found his seat in the saddle, and gave the word.

"Pitch out, Dick," he commanded; and the small cavalcade of three skirted the circle of tents and shacks to take the westward trail in single file, the water-boy riding in advance and the Forestry man bringing up the rear.

In this order the three passed the scene of the assisted landslide, where the acrid fumes of the dynamite were still hanging in the air, and came upon ground new to Bigelow and practically so to Ballard. For a mile or more the canal line hugged the shoulders of the foothills, doubling and reversing until only the steadily rising sky-line of the Elks gave evidence of its progress westward.

As in its earlier half, the night was still and

cloudless, and the stars burned with the white lustre of the high altitudes, swinging slowly to the winding course in their huge inverted bowl of velvety blackness. From camp to camp on the canal grade there was desertion absolute; and even Bigelow, with ears attuned to the alarm sounds of the wilds, had heard nothing when the cavalcade came abruptly upon Riley's camp, the outpost of the ditch-diggers.

At Riley's they found only the horse-watchers awake. From these they learned that the distant booming of the explosions had aroused only a few of the lightest sleepers. Ballard made inquiry pointing to the Craigmiles riders. Had any of them been seen in the vicinity of the outpost camp?

"Not since sundown," was the horse-watcher's answer. "About an hour before candle-lightin', two of 'em went ridin' along up-river, drivin' a little bunch o' cattle."

The engineer gathered rein and was about to pull his horse once more into the westward trail, when the boy guide put in his word.

"Somebody's taggin' us, all right, if that's what you're aimin' to find out," he said, quite coolly.

Ballard started. "What's that?" he demanded. "How do you know?"

"Been listenin'—when you-all didn't make so much noise that I couldn't," was the calm rejoin-

der. "There's two of 'em, and they struck in just after we passed the dynamite heave-down."

Ballard bent his head and listened. "I don't hear anything," he objected.

"Nachelly," said the boy. "They-all ain't sech tenderfoots as to keep on comin' when we've stopped. Want to dodge 'em?"

"There's no question about that," was the mandatory reply.

The sober-faced lad took a leaf out of the book of the past—his own or his cattle-stealing father's.

"We got to stampede your stock a few lines, Pete," he said, shortly, to the horse-watcher who had answered Ballard's inquiry. "Get up and pull your picket-pins."

"Is that right, Mr. Ballard?" asked the man.

"It is if Dick says so. I'll back his orders.

The boy gave the orders tersely after the horse-guard had risen and kicked his two companions awake. The night herdsmen were to pick and saddle their own mounts, and to pull the picket-pins for the grazing mule drove. While this was doing, the small plotter vouchsafed the necessary word of explanation to Ballard and Bigelow.

"We ride into the bunch and stampede it, headin' it along the trail the way we're goin'. After we've done made noise enough and tracks enough, and gone far enough to make them fellers lose the

sound of us that they've been follerin', we cut out of the crowd and make our little *pasear* down canyon, and the herd-riders can chase out and round up their stock again: see?"

Ballard made the sign of acquiescence; and presently the thing was done substantially as the boy had planned. The grazing mules, startled by the sudden dash of the three mounted broncos among them, and helped along by a few judicious quirt blows, broke and ran in frightened panic, carrying the three riders in the thick of the rout.

Young Carson, skilful as the son of the convict stock-lifter had been trained to be, deftly herded the thundering stampede in the desired direction; and at the end of a galloping mile abruptly gave the shrill yell of command to the two men whom he was piloting. There was a swerve aside out of the pounding melée, a dash for an opening between the swelling foothills, and the ruck of snorting mules swept on in a broad circle that would later make recapture by the night herders a simple matter of gathering up the trailing picket-ropes.

The three riders drew rein in the shelter of the arroyo gulch to breathe their horses, and Ballard gave the boy due credit.

"That was very neatly done, Dick," he said, when the thunder of the pounding hoofs had died

away in the up-river distances. "Is it going to bump those fellows off of our trail?"

The water-boy was humped over the horn of his saddle as if he had found a stomach-ache in the breathless gallop. But he was merely listening.

"I ain't reskin' any money on it," he qualified. "If them cow-punch's 've caught on to where you're goin', and what you're goin' *fer*——"

Out of the stillness filling the hill-gorge like a black sea of silence came a measured thudding of hoofs and an unmistakable squeaking of saddle leather. Like a flash the boy was afoot and reaching under his bronco's belly for a tripping hold on the horse's forefoot. "Down! and pitch the cayuses!" he quavered stridently; and as the three horses rolled in the dry sand of the arroyo bed with their late riders flattened upon their heads, the inner darkness of the gorge spat fire and there was a fine singing whine of bullets overhead.

XII

THE RUSTLERS

IN defiance of all the laws of precedence, it was the guest who first rose to the demands of the spiteful occasion. While Ballard was still struggling with the holster strappings of his rifle, Bigelow had disengaged his weapon and was industriously pumping a rapid-fire volley into the flame-spitting darkness of the gorge.

The effect of the prompt reply in kind was quickly made manifest. The firing ceased as abruptly as it had begun, a riderless horse dashed snorting down the bed of the dry arroyo, narrowly missing a stumbling collision with the living obstructions lying in his way, and other gallopings were heard withdrawing into the hill-shadowed obscurities.

It was Ballard who took the water-boy to task when they had waited long enough to be measurably certain that the attackers had left the field.

"You were mistaken, Dick," he said, breaking

the strained silence. "There were more than two of them."

Young Carson was getting his horse up, and he appeared to be curiously at fault.

"You're plumb right, Cap'n Ballard," he admitted. "But that ain't what's pinchin' me: there's always enough of 'em night-herdin' this end of the range so 'at they could have picked up another hand 'r two. What I cayn't tumble to is how they-all out-rid us."

"To get ahead of us, you mean?"

"That's it. We're in the neck of a little hog-back draw that goes on down to the big canyon. The only other trail into the draw is along by the river and up this-a-way—'bout a mile and a half furder 'n the road we come, I reckon."

It was the persistent element of mystery once more thrusting itself into the prosaic field of the industries; but before Ballard could grapple with it, the fighting guest cut in quietly.

"One of their bullets seems to have nipped me in the arm," he said, admitting the fact half reluctantly and as if it were something to be ashamed of. "Will you help me tie it up?"

Ballard came out of the speculative fog with a bound.

"Good heavens, Bigelow! are you hit? Why didn't you say something?" he exclaimed, diving

into the pockets of his duck coat for matches and a candle-end.

"It wasn't worth while; it's only a scratch, I guess."

But the lighted candle-end proved it to be something more; a ragged furrow plowed diagonally across the forearm. Ballard dressed it as well as he could, the water-boy holding the candle, and when the rough job of surgery was done, was for sending the Forestry man back to the valley head and Castle 'Cadia with the wound for a sufficient reason. But Bigelow developed a sudden vein of stubbornness. He would neither go back alone, nor would he consent to be escorted.

"A little thing like this is all in the day's work," he protested. "We'll go on, when you're ready; or, rather, we'll go and hunt for the owner of that horse whose saddle I suppose I must have emptied. I'm just vindictive enough to hope that its rider was the fellow who pinked me."

As it happened, the hope was to be neither confirmed nor positively denied. A little farther up the dry arroyo the candle-end, sputtering to its extinction, showed them a confusion of hoof tramplings in the yielding sand, but nothing more. Dead or wounded, the horse-losing rider had evidently been carried off by his companions.

"Which proves pretty conclusively that there

must have been more than two," was Ballard's deduction, when they were again pushing cautiously down the inner valley toward its junction with the great canyon. "But why should two, or a dozen of them, fire on us in the dark? How could they know whether we were friends or enemies?"

Bigelow's quiet laugh had a touch of grimness in it.

"Your Elbow Canyon mysteries have broken bounds," he suggested. "Your staff should include an expert psychologist, Mr. Ballard."

Ballard's reply was belligerent. "If we had one, I'd swap him for a section of mounted police," he declared; and beyond that the narrow trail in the cliff-walled gorge of the Boiling Water forbade conversation.

Three hours farther down the river trail, when the summer dawn was paling the stars in the narrow strip of sky overhead, the perpendicular walls of the great canyon gave back a little, and looking past the water-boy guide, Ballard saw an opening marking the entrance of a small tributary stream from the north; a little green oasis in the vast desert of frowning cliffs and tumbled boulders, with a log cabin and a tiny corral nestling under the portal rock of the smaller stream.

"Hello!" said Bigelow, breaking the silence in which they had been riding for the greater

part of the three hours, "what's this we are coming to?"

Ballard was about to pass the query on to the boy when an armed man in the flapped hat and overalls of a range rider stepped from behind a boulder and barred the way. There was a halt, an exchange of words between young Carson and the flap-hatted trail-watcher in tones so low as to be inaudible to the others, and the armed one faced about, rather reluctantly, it seemed, to lead the way to the cabin under the cliff.

At the dismounting before the cabin door, the boy cleared away a little of the mystery.

"This yere is whar I live when I'm at home," he drawled, lapsing by the influence of the propinquity into the Tennessee idiom which was his birthright. "Pap'll get ye your breakfas' while I'm feedin' the bronc's."

Ballard glanced quickly at his guest and met the return glance of complete intelligence in the steady gray eyes of the Forestry man. The cabin and the corral in the secluded canyon were sufficiently accounted for. But one use could be made of a stock enclosure in such an inaccessible mountain fastness. The trail station in the heart of the Boiling Water wilderness was doubtless the headquarters of the "rustlers" who lived by preying upon the King of Arcadia's flocks and herds.

"Your allies in the little war against Colonel Craigmiles," said Bigelow, and there was something like a touch of mild reproach in his low tone when he added: "Misery isn't the only thing that 'acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.'"

"Apparently not," said Ballard; and they went together into the kitchen half of the cabin which was built, in true Tennessee fashion, as "two pens and a passage."

The welcome accorded them by the sullen-faced man who was already frying rashers of bacon over the open fire on the hearth was not especially cordial. "Mek' ye an arm and re'ch for yerselves," was his sole phrase of hospitality, when the bacon and pan-bread were smoking on the huge hewn slab which served for a table; and he neither ate with his guests nor waited upon them, save to refill the tin coffee cups as they were emptied.

Neither of the two young men stayed longer than they were obliged to in the dirty, leather-smelling kitchen. There was freedom outside, with the morning world of fresh, zestful immensities for a smoking-room; and when they had eaten, they went to sit on a flat rock by the side of the little stream to fill and light their pipes, Ballard crumbling the cut-plug and stoppering the pipe for his crippled companion.

"How is the bullet-gouge by this time?" he questioned, when the tobacco was alight.

"It's pretty sore, and no mistake," Bigelow acknowledged frankly. Whereupon Ballard insisted upon taking the bandages off and re-dressing the wound, with the crystal-clear, icy water of the mountain stream for its cleansing.

"It was a sheer piece of idiocy on my part—letting you come on with me after you got this," was his verdict, when he had a daylight sight of the bullet score. "But I don't mean to be idiotic twice in the same day," he went on. "You're going to stay right here and keep quiet until we come along back and pick you up, late this afternoon."

Bigelow made a wry face.

"Nice, cheerful prospect," he commented. "The elder cattle thief isn't precisely one's ideal of the jovial host. By the way, what was the matter with him while we were eating breakfast? He looked and acted as if there were a sick child in some one of the dark corners which he was afraid we might disturb."

Ballard nodded. "I was wondering if you remarked it. Did you hear the sick baby?"

"I heard noises—besides those that Carson was so carefully making with the skillet and the tin plates. The room across the passage from us wasn't empty."

"That was my guess," rejoined Ballard, pulling

thoughtfully at his short pipe. "I heard voices and tramplings, and, once in a while, something that sounded remarkably like a groan—or an oath."

Bigelow nodded in his turn. "More of the mysteries, you'd say; but this time they don't especially concern us. Have you fully made up your mind to leave me here while you go on down to the railroad? Because if you have, you and the boy will have to compel my welcome from the old robber: I'd never have the face to ask him for a whole day's hospitality."

"I'll fix that," said Ballard, and when the boy came from the corral with the saddled horses, he went to do it, leaving Bigelow to finish his pipe on the flat rock of conference.

The "fixing" was not accomplished without some difficulty, as it appeared to the young man sitting on the flat stone at the stream side. Dick brought his father to the door, and Ballard did the talking—considerably more of it than might have been deemed necessary for the simple request to be proffered. At the end of the talk, Ballard came back to the flat stone.

"You stay," he said briefly to Bigelow. "Carson will give you your dinner. But he says he has a sick man on his hands in the cabin, and you'll have to excuse him."

"He was willing?" queried Bigelow.

"No; he wasn't at all willing. He acted as if he were a loaded camel, and your staying was going to be the final back-breaking straw. But he's a Tennessean, and we've been kind to his boy. The ranch is yours for the day, only if I were you, I shouldn't make too free use of it."

Bigelow smiled.

"I'll be 'meachum' and keep fair in the middle of the road. I don't know anything that a prosecuting attorney could make use of against the man who has given me my breakfast, and who promises to give me my dinner, and I don't want to know anything. Please don't waste any more daylight on me: Dick has the horses ready, and he is evidently growing anxious."

Ballard left the Forestry man smoking and sunning himself on the flat boulder when he took the down-canyon trail with the sober-faced boy for his file leader, and more than once during the rather strenuous day to which the pocket-gulch incident was the introduction, his thoughts went back to Bigelow, marooned in the depths of the great canyon with the saturnine cattle thief, the sick man, and doubtless other members of the band of "rustlers."

It was therefore, with no uncertain feeling of relief that he returned in the late afternoon at the head of a file of as hard-looking miscreants as ever were gathered in a sheriff's posse, and found

Bigelow sitting on the step of the Carson cabin, still nursing the bandaged arm, and still smoking the pipe of patience.

"I'm left to do the honours, gentlemen," said the Forestry man, rising and smiling quaintly. "The owner of the ranch regrets to say that he has been unavoidably called away; but the feed in the corral and the provisions in the kitchen are yours for the taking and the cooking."

The sheriff, a burly giant whose face, figure, garmenting and graceful saddle-seat proclaimed the ex-cattleman, laughed appreciatively.

"Bat Carson knows a healthy climate as far as he can see the sun a-shinin'," he chuckled; and then to his deputies: "Light down, boys, and we'll see what sort o' chuck he's left for us."

In the dismounting Ballard drew Bigelow aside. "What has happened?" he asked.

"You can prove nothing by me," returned Bigelow, half quizzically. "I've been asleep most of the day. When I woke up, an hour or so ago, the doors were open and the cabin was empty. Also, there was a misspelled note charcoaled on a box-cover in the kitchen, making us free of the horse-bait and the provisions. Also, again, a small bunch of cattle that I had seen grazing in a little park up the creek had disappeared."

"Um," said Ballard, discontentedly. "All of

which makes us accessories after the fact in another raid on Colonel Craigmiles's range herd. I don't like that."

"Nor do I," Bigelow agreed. "But you can't eat a man's bread, and then stay awake to see which way he escapes. I'm rather glad I was sleepy enough not to be tempted. Which reminds me: you must be about all in on that score yourself, Mr. Ballard."

"I? Oh, no; I got in five or six hours on the railroad train, going and coming between Jack's Cabin and the county seat."

The posse members were tramping into the kitchen to ransack it for food and drink, and Bigelow stood still farther aside.

"You managed to gather up a beautiful lot of cutthroats in the short time at your disposal," he remarked.

"Didn't I? And now you come against one of my weaknesses, Bigelow: I can't stay mad. Last night I thought I'd be glad to see a bunch of the colonel's cow-boys well hanged. To-day I'm sick and ashamed to be seen tagging this crew of hired sure-shots into the colonel's domain."

"Just keep on calling it the Arcadia Company's domain, and perhaps the feeling will wear off," suggested the Forestry man.

"It's no joke," said Ballard, crustily; and then

he went in to take his chance of supper with the sheriff and his "sure-shots."

There was still sufficient daylight for the upper canyon passage when the rough-riders had eaten Carson out of house and home, and were mounted again for the ascent to the Kingdom of Arcadia. In the up-canyon climb, the sheriff kept the boy, Dick, within easy bridle clutch, remembering a certain other canyon faring in which the cattle thief's son had narrowly missed putting his father's captors, men and horses, into the torrent of the Boiling Water. Ballard and Bigelow rode ahead; and when the thunderous diapason of the river permitted, they talked.

"How did they manage to move the sick man?" asked Ballard, when the trail and the stream gave him leave.

"That is another of the things that I don't know; I'm a leather-bound edition of an encyclopædia when it comes to matters of real information," was the ironical answer. "But your guess of this morning was right; there was a sick man—sick or hurt some way. I took the liberty of investigating a little when I awoke and found the ranch deserted. The other room of the cabin was a perfect shambles."

"Blood?" queried the engineer; and Bigelow nodded.

"Blood everywhere."

"A falling-out among thieves, I suppose," said Ballard, half-absently; and again Bigelow said: "I don't know."

"The boy knows," was Ballard's comment. "He knew before he left the ranch this morning. I haven't been able to get a dozen words out of him all day."

Just here both stream-noise and trail-narrowing cut in to forbid further talk, and Bigelow drew back to let Ballard lead in the single-file progress along the edge of the torrent.

It was in this order that they came finally into the Arcadian grass-lands, through a portal as abrupt as a gigantic doorway. It was the hour of sunset for the high peaks of the Elk range, and the purple shadows were already gathering among the rounded hills of the hogback. Off to the left the two advanced riders of the posse cavalcade saw the evening kitchen-smoke of Riley's ditch-camp. On the hills to the right a few cattle were grazing unherded.

But two things in the prospect conspired to make Ballard draw rein so suddenly as to bring him awkwardly into collision with his follower. One was a glimpse of the Castle 'Cadia touring car trundling swiftly away to the eastward on the river road; and the other was a slight barrier of

tree branches piled across the trail fairly under his horse's nose. Stuck upon a broken twig of the barrier was a sheet of paper; and there was still sufficient light to enable the chief engineer to read the type-written lines upon it when he dropped from the saddle.

"Mr. Ballard:" it ran. "You are about to commit an act of the crudest injustice. Take the advice of an anxious friend, and quench the fire of enmity before it gets beyond control."

There was no signature; and Ballard was still staring after the disappearing automobile when he mechanically passed the sheet of paper up to Bigelow. The Forestry man read the type-written note and glanced back at the sheriff's posse just emerging from the canyon portal.

"What will you do?" he asked; and Ballard came alive with a start and shook his head.

"I don't know: if we could manage to overtake that auto. . . . But it's too late now to do anything, Bigelow. I've made my complaint and sworn out the warrants. Beckwith will serve them—he's obliged to serve them."

"Of course," said Bigelow; and together they waited for the sheriff's posse to close up.

XIII

THE LAW AND THE LADY

IT touched a little spring of wonderment in the Forestry man when Ballard made the waiting halt merely an excuse for a word of leave-taking with Sheriff Beckwith; a brittle exchange of formalities in which no mention was made of the incident of the brush barrier and the type-written note.

"You have your warrants, and you know your way around in the valley; you won't need me," was the manner in which the young engineer drew out of the impending unpleasantness. "When you have taken your prisoners to the county seat, the company's attorneys will do the rest."

Beckwith, being an ex-cattleman, was grimly sarcastic.

"This is my job, and I'll do it up man-size and b'ligerent, Mr. Ballard. But between us three and the gate-post, you ain't goin' to make anything by it—barrin' a lot o' bad blood. The old colonel 'll give a bond and bail his men, and there you are again, right where you started from."

"That's all right; I believe in the law, and I'm giving it a chance," snapped Ballard; and the two parties separated, the sheriff's posse taking the river road, and Ballard leading the way across country in the direction of Fitzpatrick's field headquarters.

Rather more than half of the distance from the canyon head to the camp had been covered before the boy, Carson, had lagged far enough behind to give Bigelow a chance for free speech with Ballard, but the Forestry man improved the opportunity as soon as it was given him.

"You still believe there is no hope of a compromise?" he began. "What the sheriff said a few minutes ago is quite true, you know. The cow-boys will be back in a day or two, and it *will* make bad blood."

"Excuse me," said Ballard, irritably; "you are an onlooker, Mr. Bigelow, and you can afford to pose as a peacemaker. But I've had all I can stand. If Colonel Craigmiles can't control his flap-hatted bullies, we'll try to help him. There is a week's work for half a hundred men and teams lying in that ditch over yonder," pointing with his quirt toward the dynamited cutting. "Do you think I'm going to lie down and let these cattle-punchers ride rough-shod over me and the company I represent? Not to-day, or any other day, I assure you."

"Then you entirely disregard the little typewritten note?"

"In justice to my employers, I am bound to call Colonel Craigmiles's bluff, whatever form it takes."

Bigelow rode in silence for the next hundred yards. Then he began again.

"It doesn't seem like the colonel: to go at you indirectly that way."

"He was in that automobile: I saw him. The notice could scarcely have been posted without his knowledge."

"No," Bigelow agreed, slowly. But immediately afterward he added: "There were others in the car."

"I know it—four or five of them. But that doesn't let the colonel out."

Again Bigelow relapsed into silence, and the camp-fires of Fitzpatrick's headquarters were in sight when he said:

"You confessed to me a few hours ago that one of your weaknesses was the inability to stay angry. Will you pardon me if I say that it seems to have its compensation in the law of recurrences?"

Ballard's laugh was frankly apologetic. "You may go farther and say that I am ill-mannered enough to quarrel with a good friend who cheerfully gets himself shot up in my behalf. Overlook it, Mr. Bigelow; and I'll try to remember that I

am a partisan, while you are only a good-natured non-combatant. This little affair is a fact accomplished, so far as we are concerned. The colonel's cow-men dynamited our ditch; Sheriff Beckwith will do his duty; and the company's attorney will see to it that somebody pays the penalty. Let's drop it—as between us two."

Being thus estopped, Bigelow held his peace; and a little later they were dismounting before the door of Fitzpatrick's commissary. When the contractor had welcomed and fed them, Ballard rolled into the nearest bunk and went to sleep to make up the arrearages, leaving his guest to smoke alone. Bigelow took his desertion good-naturedly, and sat for an hour or more on a bench in front of the storeroom, puffing quietly at his pipe, and taking an onlooker's part in the ditch-diggers' games of dice-throwing and card-playing going on around the great fire in the plaza.

When the pipe went out after its second filling, he got up and strolled a little way beyond the camp limits. The night was fine and mild for the altitudes, and he had walked a circling mile before he found himself again at the camp confines. It was here, at the back of the mule drove, that he became once more an onlooker; this time a thoroughly mystified one.

The little drama, at which the Forestry expert

was the single spectator, was chiefly pantomimic, but it lacked nothing in eloquent action. Flat upon the ground, and almost among the legs of the grazing mules, lay a diminutive figure, face down, digging fingers and toes into the hoof-cut earth, and sobbing out a strange jargon of oaths and childish ragings. Before Bigelow could speak, the figure rose to its knees, its face disfigured with passion, and its small fists clenching themselves at the invisible. It was Dick Carson; and the words which Bigelow heard seemed to be shaken by some unseen force out of the thin, stoop-shouldered little body: "Oh, my Lordy! ef it could on'y be somebody else! But ther' ain't nobody else; an' I'll go to hell if I don't do it!"

Now, at all events, Bigelow would have cut in, but the action of the drama was too quick for him. Like a flash the water-boy disappeared among the legs of the grazing animals; and a few minutes afterward the night gave back the sound of galloping hoofs racing away to the eastward.

Bigelow marked the direction of the water-boy's flight. Since it was toward the valley head and Castle 'Cadia, he guessed that young Carson's errand concerned itself in some way with the sheriff's raid upon the Craigmiles ranch outfit. Here, however, conjecture tripped itself and fell down. Both parties in whatever conflict the

sheriff's visit might provoke were the boy's natural enemies.

Bigelow was wrestling with this fresh bit of mystery when he went to find his bunk in the commissary; it got into his dreams and was still present when the early morning call of the camp was sounded. But neither at the candle-lighted breakfast, nor later, when Ballard asked him if he were fit for a leisurely ride to the southern watershed for the day's outwearing, did he speak of young Carson's desertion.

Fitzpatrick spoke of it, though, when the chief and his companion were mounting for the watershed ride.

"You brought my water-boy back with you last night, didn't you, Mr. Ballard?" he asked.

"Certainly; he came in with us. Why? Have you lost him?"

"Him and one of the saddle broncos. And I don't much like the look of it."

"Oh, I guess he'll turn up all right," said Ballard easily.

It was Bigelow's time to speak, but something restrained him, and the contractor's inquiry died a natural death when Ballard gathered the reins and pointed the way to the southward hills.

By nine o'clock the two riders were among the foothills of the southern Elks, and the chief engi-

neer of the Arcadia Company was making a very practical use of his guest. Bigelow was an authority on watersheds, stream-basins, the conservation of moisture by forested slopes, and kindred subjects of vital importance to the construction chief of an irrigation scheme; and the talk held steadily to the technical problems, with the Forestry expert as the lecturer.

Only once was there a break and a lapse into the humanities. It was when the horses had climbed one of the bald hills from the summit of which the great valley, with its dottings of camps and its streaking of canal gradings, was spread out map-like beneath them. On the distant river road, progressing by perspective inches toward the lower end of the valley, trotted a mixed mob of horsemen, something more than doubling in numbers the sheriff's posse that had ridden over the same road in the opposite direction the previous evening.

"Beckwith with his game-bag?" queried Bigelow, gravely; and Ballard said: "I guess so," and immediately switched the talk back to the watershed technicalities.

It was within an hour of the grading-camp supper-time when the two investigators of moisture-beds and auxiliary reservoirs rode into Fitzpatrick's headquarters and found a surprise

awaiting them. The Castle 'Cadia runabout was drawn up before the commissary; and young Blacklock, in cap and gloves and dust-coat, was tinkering with the motor.

"The same to you, gentlemen," he said, jocosely, when he took his head out of the bonnet. "I was just getting ready to go and chase you some more. We've been waiting a solid hour, I should say."

"'We'?" questioned Ballard.

"Yes; Miss Elsa and I. We've been hunting you in every place a set of rubber tires wouldn't balk at, all afternoon. Say; you don't happen to have an extra spark-plug about your clothes, either of you, do you? One of these is cracked in the porcelain, and she skips like a dog on three legs."

Ballard ignored the motor disability completely.

"You brought Miss Craigmiles here? Where is she now?" he demanded.

The collegian laughed.

"She's in the grand *salon*, and Fitzpatrick the gallant is making her a cup of commissary tea. Wouldn't that jar you?"

Ballard swung out of his saddle and vanished through the open door of the commissary, leaving Bigelow and the motor-maniac to their own devices. In the littered storeroom he found Miss

Craigmiles, sitting upon a coil of rope and calmly drinking her tea from a new tin can.

"At last!" she sighed, smiling up at him; and then: "Mercy me!" how savage you look! We are trespassers; I admit it. But you'll be lenient with us, won't you? Jerry says there is a broken spark-plug, or something; but I am sure we can move on if we're told to. You have come to tell us to move on, Mr. Ballard?"

His frown was only the outward and visible sign of the inward attempt to grapple with the possibilities; but it made his words sound something less than solicitous.

"This is no place for you," he began; but she would not let him go on.

"I have been finding it quite a pleasant place, I assure you. Mr. Fitzpatrick is an Irish gentleman. No one could have been kinder. You've no idea of the horrible things he promised to do to the cook if this tea wasn't just right."

If she were trying to make him smile, she succeeded. Fitzpatrick's picturesque language to his men was the one spectacular feature of the headquarters camp.

"That proves what I said—that this is no place for you," he rejoined, still deprecating the camp crudities. "And you've been here an hour, Blacklock says."

"An hour and twelve minutes, to be exact," she admitted, tilting the tiny watch pinned upon the lapel of her driving-coat. "But you left us no alternative. We have driven uncounted miles this afternoon, looking for you and Mr. Bigelow."

Ballard flushed uncomfortably under the tan and sunburn. Miss Craigmiles could have but one object in seeking him, he decided; and he would have given worlds to be able to set the business affair and the sentimental on opposite sides of an impassable chasm. Since it was not to be, he said what he was constrained to say with characteristic abruptness.

"It is too late. The matter is out of my hands, now. The provocation was very great; and in common loyalty to my employers I was obliged to strike back. Your father——"

She stopped him with a gesture that brought the blood to his face again.

"I know there has been provocation," she qualified. "But it has not been all on one side. Your men have told you how our range-riders have annoyed them: probably they have not told you how they have given blow for blow, killing cattle on the railroad, supplying themselves with fresh meat from our herd, filling up or draining the water-holes. And two days ago, at this very camp. . . . I don't know the merits of the case; but I do know

that one of our men was shot through the shoulder, and is lying critically near to death."

He nodded gloomily. "That was bad," he admitted, adding: "And it promptly brought on more violence. On the night of the same day your cow-men returned and dynamited the canal."

Again she stopped him with the imperative little gesture.

"Did you see them do it?"

"Naturally, no one saw them do it. But it was done, nevertheless."

She rose and faced him fairly.

"You found my note last evening—when you were returning with Sheriff Beckwith?"

"I found an unsigned note on a little barrier of tree-branches on the trail; yes."

"I wrote it and put it there," she declared. "I told you you were about to commit an act of injustice, and you have committed it—a very great one, indeed, Mr. Ballard."

"I am open to conviction," he conceded, almost morosely. She was confronting him like an angry goddess, and mixed up with the thought that he had never seen her so beautiful and so altogether desirable was another thought that he should like to run away and hide.

"Yes; you are open to conviction—after the fact!" she retorted, bitterly. "Do you know

what you have done? You have fallen like a hot-headed boy into a trap set for you by my father's enemies. You have carefully stripped Arcadia of every man who could defend our cattle—just as it was planned for you to do."

"But, good heavens!" he began, "I——"

"Hear me out," she commanded, looking more than ever the princess of her father's kingdom. "Down in the canyon of the Boiling Water there is a band of outlaws that has harried this valley for years. Assuming that you would do precisely what you have done, some of these men came up and dynamited your canal, timing the raid to fit your inspection tour. Am I making it sufficiently plain?"

"O my sainted ancestors!" he groaned. And then: "Please go on; you can't make it any worse."

"They confidently expected that you would procure a wholesale arrest of the Arcadia ranch force; but they did not expect you to act as promptly as you did. That is why they turned and fired upon you in Dry Valley Gulch: they thought they were suspected and pursued, not by you or any of your men, but by our cow-boys. Your appearance at the cabin at the mouth of Deer Creek yesterday morning explained things, and they let you go on without taking vengeance for the man Mr. Bigelow

had shot in the Dry Valley affray. They were willing to let the greater matter outweigh the smaller."

Ballard said "Good heavens!" again, and leaned weakly against the commissary counter. Then, suddenly, it came over him like a cool blast of wind on a hot day that this clear-eyed, sweet-faced young woman's intimate knowledge of the labyrinthine tangle was almost superhuman enough to be uncanny. Would the nerve-shattering mysteries never be cleared away?

"You know all this—as only an eye-witness could know," he stammered. "How, in the name of all that is wonderful——"

"We are not without friends—even in your camps," she admitted. "Word came to Castle 'Cadia of your night ride and its purpose. For the later details there was little Dick. My father once had his father sent to the penitentiary for cattle-stealing. In pity for the boy, I persuaded some of our Denver friends to start a petition for a pardon. Dick has not forgotten it; and last night he rode to Castle 'Cadia to tell me what I have told you—the poor little lad being more loyal to me than he is to his irreclaimable wretch of a father. Also, he told me another thing: to-night, while the range cattle are entirely unguarded, there will be another raid from Deer Creek. I thought

you might like to know how hard a blow you have struck us, this time. That is why I have made Jerry drive me a hundred miles or so up and down the valley this afternoon."

The situation was well beyond speech, any exculpatory speech of Ballard's, but there was still an opportunity for deeds. Going to the door he called to Bigelow, and when the Forestry man came in, his part in what was to be done was assigned abruptly.

"Mr. Bigelow, you can handle the runabout with one good arm, I'm sure: drive Miss Craigmiles home, if you please, and let me have Blacklock."

"Certainly, if Miss Elsa is willing to exchange a good chauffeur for a poor one," was the good-natured reply. And then to his hostess: "Are you willing, Miss Craigmiles?"

"Mr. Ballard is the present tyrant of Arcadia. If he shows us the door——"

Bigelow was already at the car step, waiting to help her in. There was time only for a single sentence of caution, and Ballard got it in a swift aside.

"Don't be rash again," she warned him. "You have plenty of men here. If Carson can be made to understand that you will not let him take advantage of the plot in which he has made you his innocent accessory——"

"Set your mind entirely at rest," he cut in, with a curtness which was born altogether of his determination, and not at all of his attitude toward the woman he loved. "There will be no cattle-lifting in this valley to-night—or at any other time until your own caretakers have returned."

"Thank you," she said simply; and a minute later Ballard and young Blacklock stood aside to let Bigelow remove himself, his companion, and the smart little car swiftly from the scene.

"Say, Mr. Ballard, this is no end good of you—to let me in for a little breather of sport," said the collegian, when the fast runabout was fading to a dusty blur in the sunset purplings. "Bigelow gave me a hint; said there was a scrap of some sort on. Make me your side partner, and I'll do you proud."

"You are all right," laughed Ballard, with a sudden access of light-heartedness. "But the first thing to do is to get a little hay out of the rack. Come in and let us see what you can make of a camp supper. Fitzpatrick bets high on his cook—which is more than I'd do if he were mine."

XIV

THE MAXIM

BALLARD and Blacklock ate supper at the contractor's table in the commissary, and the talk, what there was of it, left the Kentuckian aside. The Arcadian summering was the young collegian's first plunge into the manful realities, and it was not often that he came upon so much raw material in the lump as the contractor's camp, and more especially the jovial Irish contractor himself, afforded.

Ballard was silent for cause. Out of the depths of humiliation for the part he had been made to play in the plan for robbing Colonel Craigmiles he had promised unhesitatingly to prevent the robbery. But the means for preventing it were not so obvious as they might have been. Force was the only argument which would appeal to the cattle-lifters, and assuredly there were men enough and arms enough in the Fitzpatrick camps to hold up any possible number of rustlers that Carson could bring into the valley. But would the contractor's men consent to fight the colonel's battle?

This was the crucial query which only Fitzpatrick could answer; and at the close of the meal, Ballard made haste to have private speech with the contractor in the closet-like pay office.

"You see what we are up against, Bourke," he summed up when he had explained the true inwardness of the situation to the Irishman. "Bare justice, the justice that even an enemy has a right to expect, shoves us into the breach. We've got to stop this raid on the Craigmiles cattle."

Fitzpatrick was shaking his head dubiously.

"Sure, now; *I'm* with you, Mr. Ballard," he allowed, righting himself with an effort that was a fine triumph over personal prejudice. "But it's only fair to warn you that not a man in any of the ditch camps will lift a finger in any fight to save the colonel's property. This shindy with the cowboys has gone on too long, and it has been too bitter."

"But this time they've got it to do," Ballard insisted warmly. "They are your men, under your orders."

"Under my orders to throw dirt, maybe; but not to shoulder the guns and do the tin-soldier act. There's plinty of men, as you say; Polacks and Hungarians and Eyetalians and Irish—and the Irish are the only ones you could count on in a hooraw, boys! I know every man of them, Mr.

Ballard, and, not to be mincin' the wor-rd, they'd see you—or me, either—in the hot place before they'd point a gun at annybody who was giving the Craigmiles outfit a little taste of its own medicine."

Fitzpatrick's positive assurance was discouraging, but Ballard would not give up.

"How many men do you suppose Carson can muster for this cattle round-up?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know; eighteen or twenty at the outside, maybe."

"You've got two hundred and forty-odd here and at Riley's; in all that number don't you suppose you could find a dozen or two who would stand by us?"

"Honestly, then, I don't, Mr. Ballard. I'm not lukewarm, as ye might think: I'll stand with you while I can squint an eye to sight th' gun. But the minute you tell the b'ys what you're wantin' them to do, that same minute they'll give you the high-ball signal and quit."

"Strike work, you mean?"

"Just that."

Ballard went into a brown study, and Fitzpatrick respected it. After a time the silence was broken by the faint tapping of the tiny telegraph instrument on the contractor's desk. Ballard's chair righted itself with a crash.

"The wire," he exclaimed; "I had forgotten

that you had brought it down this far on the line. I wonder if I can get Bromley?"

"Sure ye can," said the contractor; and Ballard sat at the desk to try.

It was during the preliminary key-clickings that Blacklock came to the door of the pay office. "There's a man out here wanting to speak to you, Mr. Fitzpatrick," he announced; and the contractor went out, returning presently to break into Ballard's preoccupied effort to raise the office at Elbow Canyon.

"One of the foremen came in to say that the Craigmiles men were coming back. For the last half-hour horsemen by twos and threes have been trailing up the river road and heading for the ranch headquarters," was the information he brought.

"It's Carson's gang," said Ballard, at once.

"Yes; but I didn't give it away to the foreman. Their scheme is to make as much of a round-up as they can while it's light enough to see. There'll be a small piece of a moon, and that'll do for the drive down the canyon. Oh, I'll bet you they've got it all figured out to a dot. Carson's plenty smooth when it comes to plannin' any devilment."

Ballard turned back to the telegraph key and rattled it impatiently. Time was growing precious; was already temerariously short for carrying out

the programme he had hastily determined upon in the few minutes of brown study.

"That you, Loudon?" he clicked, when, after interminable tappings, the breaking answer came; and upon the heels of the snipped-out affirmative he cut in masterfully.

"Ask no questions, but do as I say, quick. You said colonel had machine-gun at his mine: Rally gang stone-buckies, rush that gun, and capture it. Can you do it?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply, "if you don't mind good big bill funeral expenses, followed by labour riot."

"We've got to have gun."

"The colonel would lend it if—hold wire minute, Miss Elsa just crossing bridge in runabout. I'll ask her."

Ballard's sigh of relief was almost a groan, and he waited with good hope. Elsa would know why he wanted the Maxim, and if the thing could be done without an express order from her father to the Mexican mine guards, she would do it. After what seemed to the engineer like the longest fifteen minutes he had ever endured, the tapping began again.

"Gun here," from Bromley. "What shall I do with it?"

The answer went back shot-like: "Load on en-

gine and get it down to end of branch nearest this camp quick."

"Want me to come with it?"

"No; stay where you are, and you may be next Arcadian chief construction. Hurry gun."

Fitzpatrick was his own telegrapher, and as he read what passed through key and sounder his smile was like that which goes with the prize-fighter's preliminary hand-shaking.

"Carson'll need persuading," he commented. "'Tis well ye've got the artillery moving. What's next?"

"The next thing is to get out the best team you have, the one that will make the best time, and send it to the end of track to meet Bromley's special. How far is it—six miles, or thereabouts?"

"Seven, or maybe a little worse. I'll go with the team myself, and push on the reins. Do I bring the gun here?"

Ballard thought a moment. "No; since we're to handle this thing by ourselves, there is no need of making talk in the camps. Do you know a little sand creek in the hogback called Dry Valley?"

"Sure, I do."

"Good. Make a straight line for the head of that arroyo, and we'll meet you there, Blacklock and I, with an extra saddle-horse."

Fitzpatrick was getting a duck driving-coat out of a locker.

"What's your notion, Mr. Ballard?—if a man might be asking?"

"Wait, and you'll see," was the crisp reply. "It will work; you'll see it work like a charm, Bourke. But you must burn the miles with that team of broncos. We'll be down and out if you don't make connections with the Maxim. And say; toss a coil of that quarter-inch rope into your wagon as you go. We'll need that, too."

When the contractor was gone, Ballard called the collegian into the pay office and put him in touch with the pressing facts. A raid was to be made on Colonel Craigmiles's cattle by a band of cattle thieves; the raid was to be prevented; means to the preventing end—three men and a Maxim automatic rapid-fire gun. Would Blacklock be one of the three?

"Would a hungry little dog eat his supper, Mr. Ballard? By Jove! but you're a good angel in disguise—to let me in for the fun! And you've pressed the right button, too, by George! There's a Maxim in the military kit at college, and I can work her to the queen's taste."

"Then you may consider yourself chief of the artillery," was the prompt rejoinder. "I suppose I don't need to ask if you can ride a range pony?"

Blacklock's laugh was an excited chuckle.

"Now you're shouting. What I don't know about cow-ponies would make the biggest book you ever saw. But I'd ride a striped zebra rather than be left out of this. Do we hike out now?—right away?"

"There is no rush; you can smoke a pipe or two—as I'm going to. Fitzpatrick has to drive fourteen miles to work off his handicap."

Ballard filled his pipe and lighting it sat down to let the mental polishing wheels grind upon the details of his plan. Blacklock tried hard to assume the manly attitude of nonchalance; tried and failed utterly. Once for every five minutes of the waiting he had to jump up and make a trip to the front of the commissary to ease off the excess pressure; and at the eleventh return Ballard was knocking the ash out of his pipe.

"Getting on your nerves, Jerry?" he asked. "All right: we'll go and bore a couple of holes into the night, if that's what you're anxious to be doing."

The start was made without advertisement. Fitzpatrick's horse-keeper was smoking cigarettes on the little porch platform, and at a word from Ballard he disappeared in the direction of the horse-rope. Giving him the necessary saddling time, the two made their way around the card-

playing groups at the plaza fire, and at the back of the darkened mess-tent found the man waiting with three saddled broncos, all with rifle holsters under the stirrup leathers. Ballard asked a single question at the mounting moment.

"You haven't seen young Carson in the last hour or so, have you, Patsy?"

"Niver a hair av him: 'tis all day long he's been gone, wid Misther Bourke swearing thremenjous about the cayuse he took."

Ballard took the bridle of the led horse and the ride down the line of the canal, with Fitzpatrick's "piece of a moon" to silver the darkness, was begun as a part of the day's work by the engineer, but with some little trepidation by the young collegian, whose saddle-strivings hitherto had been confined to the well-behaved cobs in his father's stables.

At the end of the first mile Blacklock found himself growing painfully conscious of every start of the wiry little steed between his knees, and was fain to seek comfort.

"Say, Mr. Ballard; what do you do when a horse bucks under you?" he asked, wedging the inquiry between the jolts of the racking gallop.

"You don't do anything," replied Ballard, taking the pronoun in the generic sense. "The bronco usually does it all,"

"I—believe this brute's—getting ready to—buck," gasped the tyro. "He's working—my knee-holds loose—with his confounded sh—shoulder-blades."

"Freeze to him," laughed Ballard. Then he added the word of heartening: "He can't buck while you keep him on the run. Here's a smooth bit of prairie: let him out a few notches."

That was the beginning of a mad race that swept them down the canal line, past Riley's camp and out to the sand-floored cleft in the foothills far ahead of the planned meeting with Fitzpatrick. But this time the waiting interval was not wasted. Picketing the three horses, and arming themselves with a pair of the short-barrelled rifles, the advance guard of two made a careful study of the ground, pushing the reconnaissance down to the mouth of the dry valley, and a little way along the main river trail in both directions.

"Right here," said Ballard, indicating a point on the river trail just below the intersecting valley mouth, "is where you will be posted with the Maxim. If you take this boulder for a shield, you can command the gulch and the upper trail for a hundred yards or more, and still be out of range of their Winchesters. They'll probably shoot at you, but you won't mind that, with six or eight feet of granite for a breastwork, will you, Jerry?"

"Well, I should say not! Just you watch me burn 'em up when you give the word, Mr. Ballard. I believe I could hold a hundred of 'em from this rock."

"That is exactly what I want you to do—to hold them. It would be cold-blooded murder to turn the Maxim loose on them from this short range unless they force you to it. Don't forget that, Jerry."

"I sha'n't," promised the collegian; and after some further study of the topographies, they went back to the horses.

Thereupon ensued a tedious wait of an hour or more, with no sight or sound of the expected waggon, and with anxiety growing like a juggler's rose during the slowly passing minutes. Any one of a dozen things might have happened to delay Fitzpatrick, or even to make his errand a fruitless one. The construction track was rough, and the hurrying engine might have jumped the rails. The rustlers might have got wind of the gun dash and ditched the locomotive. Failing that, some of their round-up men might have stumbled upon the contractor and halted and overpowered him. Ballard and Blacklock listened anxiously for the drumming of wheels. But when the silence was broken it was not by waggon noises; the sound was in the air—a distant lowing of a herd in motion,

and the shuffling murmur of many hoofs. The inference was plain.

"By Jove! do you hear that, Jerry?" Ballard demanded. "The beggars are coming down-valley with the cattle, *and they're ahead of Fitzpatrick!*"

That was not strictly true. While the engineer was adding a hasty command to mount, Fitzpatrick's waggon came bouncing up the dry arroyo, with the snorting team in a lather of sweat.

"Sharp work, Mr. Ballard!" gasped the dust-covered driver. "They're less than a mile at the back of me, drivin' a good half of the colonel's beef herd, I'd take me oath. Say the wor-rds, and say thim shwift!"

With the scantest possible time for preparation, there was no wasting of the precious minutes. Ballard directed a quick transference of men, horses, and gun team to the lower end of the inner valley, a planting of the terrible little fighting machine behind the sheltering boulder on the main trail, and a hasty concealment of the waggon and harness animals in a grove of the scrub pines. Then he outlined his plan briskly to his two subordinates.

"They will send the herd down the canyon trail, probably with a man or two ahead of it to keep the cattle from straying up this draw," he

predicted. "The first move is to nip these head riders; after which we must turn the herd and let it find its way back home through the sand gulch where we came in. Later on——"

A rattling clatter of horse-shoes on stone rose above the muffled lowing and milling of the oncoming drove, and there was no time for further explanations. As Ballard and his companions drew back among the tree shadows in the small inner valley, a single horseman galloped down the canyon trail, wheeling abruptly in the gulch mouth to head off the cattle if they should try to turn back by way of the hogback valley. Before the echo of his shrill whistle had died away among the canyon crags, three men rose up out of the darkness, and with business-like celerity the trail guard was jerked from his saddle, bound, gagged, and tossed into the bed of an empty waggon.

"Now for the cut-out!" shouted Ballard; and the advance stragglers of the stolen herd were already in the mouth of the little valley when the three amateur line-riders dashed at them and strove to turn the drive at right angles up the dry gulch.

For a sweating minute or two the battle with brute bewilderment hung in the balance. Wheel and shout and flog as they would, they seemed able only to mass the bellowing drove in the narrow

mouth of the turn-out. But at the critical instant, when the milling tangle threatened to become a jam that must crowd itself from the trail into the near-by torrent of the Boiling Water, a few of the leaders found the open way to freedom up the hogback valley, and in another throat-parching minute there was only a cloud of dust hanging between the gulch heads to show where the battle had been raging.

This was the situation a little later when the main body of the rustlers, ten men strong, ambled unsuspectingly into the valley-mouth trap: dust in the air, a withdrawing thunder of hoof-beats, and apparent desertion of the point of hazard. Carson was the first to grasp the meaning of the dust cloud and the vanishing murmur of hoof-tramplings.

"Hell!" he rasped. "Billings has let 'em cut back up the gulch! That's on you, Buck Cummin's: I told you ye'd better hike along 'ith Billings."

"You always *was* one o' them 'I-told-ye-so' kind of liars," was the pessimistic retort of the man called Cummings; and Carson's right hand was flicking toward the ready pistol butt when a voice out of the shadows under the western cliff shaped a command clear-cut and incisive.

"Hands up out there—every man of you!"

Then, by way of charitable explanation: "You're covered—with a rapid-fire Maxim."

There were doubters among the ten; desperate men whose lawless days and nights were filled with hair's-breadth chance-takings. From these came a scattering volley of pistol shots spitting viciously at the cliff shadows.

"Show 'em, Jerry," said the voice, curtly; and from the shelter of a great boulder at the side of the main trail leaped a sheet of flame with a roar comparable to nothing on earth save its ear-splitting, nerve-shattering self. Blacklock had swept the machine-gun in a short arc over the heads of the cattle thieves, and from the cliff face and ledges above them a dropping rain of clipped pine branches and splintered rock chippings fell upon the trapped ten.

It is the new and untried that terrifies. In the group of rustlers there were men who would have wheeled horse and run a gauntlet of spitting Winchesters without a moment's hesitation. But this hidden murder-machine belching whole regiment volleys out of the shadows. . . . "Sojers, by cripes!" muttered Carson, under his breath. Then aloud: "All right, Cap'n; what you say goes as it lays."

"I said 'hands up,' and I meant it," rasped Ballard; and when the pale moonlight pricked out

the cattle-lifters in the attitude of submission: "First man on the right—knee your horse into the clump of trees straight ahead of you."

It was Fitzpatrick, working swiftly and alone, who disarmed, wrist-roped, and heel-tied to his horse each of the crestfallen ones as Ballard ordered them singly into the mysterious shadows of the pine grove. Six of the ten, including Carson, had been ground through the neutralising process, and the contractor was deftly at work on the seventh, before the magnitude of the engineer's strategy began to dawn upon them.

"*Sufferin' Jehu!*" said Carson, with an entire world of disgust and humiliation crowded into the single expletive; but when the man called Cummings broke out in a string of meaningless oaths, the leader of the cattle thieves laughed like a good loser.

"Say; how many of you did it take to run this here little bluff on us?" he queried, tossing the question to Fitzpatrick, the only captor in sight.

"You'll find out, when the time comes," replied the Irishman gruffly. "And betwixt and between, ye'll be keeping a still tongue in your head. D'ye see?"

They did see, when the last man was securely

bound and roped to his saddle beast; and it was characteristic of time, place, and the actors in the drama that few words were wasted in the summing up.

"Line them up for the back trail," was Ballard's crisp command, when Fitzpatrick and Blacklock had dragged the Maxim in from its boulder redoubt and had loaded it into the waggon beside the rope-wound Billings.

"Whereabouts does this here back trail end up —for us easy-marks, Cap'n Ballard?" It was Carson who wanted to know.

"That's for a jury to say," was the brief reply.

"You've et my bread and stabled yo' hawss in my corral," the chief rustler went on gloomily. "But that's all right—if you feel called to take up for ol' King Adam, that's fightin' ever' last shovelful o' mud you turn over in th' big valley."

Fitzpatrick was leading the way up the hoof-trampled bed of the dry valley with the waggon team, and Blacklock was marshalling the line of prisoners to follow in single file when Ballard wheeled his bronco to mount.

"I fight my own battles, Carson," he said, quietly. "You set a deadfall for me, and I tumbled in like a tenderfoot. That put it up to me to

knock out your raid. Incidentally, you and your gang will get what is coming to you for blowing a few thousand yards of earth into our canal. That's all. Line up there with the others; you've shot your string and lost."

The return route led the straggling cavalcade through the arroyo mouth, and among the low hills back of Riley's camp to a junction with the canal line grade half way to Fitzpatrick's headquarters. Approaching the big camp, Ballard held a conference with the contractor, as a result of which the waggon mules were headed to the left in a semicircular detour around the sleeping camp, the string of prisoners following as the knotted trail ropes steered it.

Another hour of easting saw the crescent moon poising over the black sky-line of the Elks, and it brought captors and captured to the end of track of the railroad where there was a siding, with a half-dozen empty material cars and Bromley's artillery special, the engine hissing softly and the men asleep on the cab cushions.

Ballard cut his prisoners foot-free, dismounted them, and locked them into an empty box-car. This done, the engine crew was aroused, the Maxim was reloaded upon the tender, and the chief gave the trainmen their instructions.

"Take the gun, and that locked box-car, back

to Elbow Canyon," he directed. "Mr. Bromley will give you orders from there."

"Carload o' hosses?" said the engineman, noting the position of the box-car opposite a temporary chute built for debarking a consignment of Fitzpatrick's scraper teams.

"No; jackasses," was Ballard's correction; and when the engine was clattering away to the eastward with its one-car train, the waggon was headed westward, with Blacklock sharing the seat beside Fitzpatrick, Ballard lying full-length on his back in the deep box-bed, and the long string of saddle animals towing from the tail-board.

At the headquarters commissary Blacklock tumbled into the handiest bunk and was asleep when he did it. But Ballard roused himself sufficiently to send a message over the wire to Bromley directing the disposal of the captured cattle thieves, who were to be transported by way of Alta Vista and the D. & U. P. to the county seat.

After that he remembered nothing until he awoke to blink at the sun shining into the little bunk room at the back of the pay office; awoke with a start to find Fitzpatrick handing him a telegram scrawled upon a bit of wrapping-paper.

"I'm just this minut' taking this off the wire,"

said the contractor, grinning sheepishly; and Ballard read the scrawl:

"D. & U. P. box-car No. 3546 here all O. K. with both side doors carefully locked and end door wide open. Nothing inside but a few bits of rope and a stale smell of tobacco smoke and corn whiskey.

"BROMLEY."

XV

HOSPES ET HOSTIS

IT was two days after the double fiasco of the cattle raid before Ballard returned to his own headquarters at Elbow Canyon; but Bromley's laugh on his friend and chief was only biding its time.

"What you didn't do to Carson and his gang was good and plenty, wasn't it, Breckenridge?" was his grinning comment, when they had been over the interval work on the dam together, and were smoking an afternoon peace pipe on the porch of the adobe office. "It's the joke of the camp. I tried to keep it dark, but the enginemen bleated about it like a pair of sheep, of course."

"Assume that I have some glimmerings of a sense of humour, and let it go at that," growled Ballard; adding; "I'm glad the hoodoo has let up on you long enough to give this outfit a chance to be amused—even at a poor joke on me."

"It has," said Bromley. "We haven't had a

shock or a shudder since you went down-valley. And I've been wondering why."

"Forget it," suggested the chief, shortly. "Call it safely dead and buried, and don't dig it up again. We have grief enough without it."

Bromley grinned again.

"Meaning that this cow-boy cattle-thief tangle in the lower valley has made you *persona non grata* at Castle 'Cadia? You're off; 'way off. You don't know Colonel Adam. So far from holding malice, he has been down here twice to thank you for stopping the Carson raid. And that reminds me: there's a Castle 'Cadia note in your mail-box—came down by the hands of one of the little Japs this afternoon." And he went in to get it.

It proved to be another dinner bidding for the chief engineer, to be accepted informally whenever he had time to spare. It was written and signed by the daughter, but she said that she spoke both for her father and herself when she urged him to come soon.

"You'll go?" queried Bromley, when Ballard had passed the faintly perfumed bit of note-paper across the arm's-reach between the two lazy-chairs.

"You know I'll go," was the half morose answer.

Bromley's smile was perfunctory.

"Of course you will," he assented. "To-night?"

"As well one time as another. Won't you go along?"

"Miss Elsa's invitation does not include me," was the gentle reminder.

"Bosh! You've had the open door, first, last, and all the time, haven't you?"

"Of course. I was only joking. But it isn't good for both of us to be off the job at the same time. I'll stay and keep on intimidating the hoodoo."

There was a material train coming in from Alta Vista, and when its long-drawn chime woke the canyon echoes, they both left the mesa and went down to the railroad yard. It was an hour later, and Ballard was changing his clothes in his bunk-room when he called to Bromley, who was checking the way-bills for the lately arrived material.

"Oh, I say, Loudon; has that canyon path been dug out again?—where the slide was?"

"Sure," said Bromley, without looking up. Then: "You're going to walk?"

"How else would I get there?" returned Ballard, who still seemed to be labouring with his handicap of moroseness.

The assistant did not reply, but a warm flush

crept up under the sunburn as he went on checking the way-bills. Later, when Ballard swung out to go to the Craigmiles's, the man at the desk let him pass with a brief "So-long," and bent still lower over his work.

Under much less embarrassing conditions, Ballard would have been prepared to find himself breathing an atmosphere of constraint when he joined the Castle 'Cadia house-party on the great tree-pillared portico of the Craigmiles mansion. But the embarrassment, if any there were, was all his own. The colonel was warmly hospitable; under her outward presentment of cheerful mockery, Elsa was palpably glad to see him; Miss Cauffrey was gently reproachful because he had not let them send Otto and the car to drive him around from the canyon; and the various guests welcomed him each after his or her kind.

During the ante-dinner pause the talk was all of the engineer's prompt snuffing-out of the cattle raid, and the praiseful comment on the little *coup de main* was not marred by any reference to the mistaken zeal which had made the raid possible. More than once Ballard found himself wondering if the colonel and Elsa, Bigelow and Blacklock, had conspired generously to keep the story of his egregious blunder from reaching the others. If they had not, there was a deal more charity in

human nature than the most cheerful optimist ever postulated, he concluded.

At the dinner-table the enthusiastic *rapport* was evenly sustained. Ballard took in the elder of the Cantrell sisters; and Wingfield, who sat opposite, quite neglected Miss Van Bryck in his efforts to make an inquisitive third when Miss Cantrell insistently returned to the exciting topic of the Carson capture—which she did after each separate endeavour on Ballard's part to escape the enthusiasm.

"Your joking about it doesn't make it any less heroic, Mr. Ballard," was one of Miss Cantrell's phrasings of the song of triumph. "Just think of it—three of you against eleven desperate outlaws!"

"Three of us, a carefully planned ambush, and a Maxim rapid-fire machine-gun," corrected Ballard. "And you forget that I let them all get away a few hours later."

"And I—the one person in all this valleyful of possible witnesses who could have made the most of it—*I* wasn't there to see," cut in Wingfield, gloomily. "It is simply catastrophic, Mr. Ballard!"

"Oh, I am sure you could imagine a much more exciting thing—for a play," laughed the engineer. "Indeed, it's your imagination, and Miss Can-

trell's, that is making a bit of the day's work take on the dramatic quality. If I were a writing person I should always fight shy of the real thing. It's always inadequate."

"Much you know about it," grumbled the playwright, from the serene and lofty heights of craftsman superiority. "And that reminds me: I've been to your camp, and what I didn't find out about that hoodoo of yours——"

It was Miss Elsa, sitting at Wingfield's right, who broke in with an entirely irrelevant remark about a Sudermann play; a remark demanding an answer; and Ballard took his cue and devoted himself thereafter exclusively to the elder Miss Cantrell. The menace of Wingfield's literary curiosity was still a menace, he inferred; and he was prepared to draw its teeth when the time should come.

As on the occasion of the engineer's former visit to Castle 'Cadia, there was an after-dinner adjournment to the big portico, where the Japanese butler served the little coffees, and the house-party fell into pairs and groups in the hammocks and lazy-chairs.

Not to leave a manifest duty undone, Ballard cornered his host at the dispersal and made, or tried to make, honourable amends for the piece of mistaken zeal which had led to the attempted

cattle-lifting. But in the midst of the first self-reproachful phrase the colonel cut him off with genial protests.

"Not anotheh word, my dear suh; don't mention it"—with a benedictory wave of the shapely hands. "We ratheh enjoyed it. The boys had thei-uh little blow-out at the county seat; and, thanks to youh generous intervention, we didn't lose hoof, hide nor ho'n through the machinations of ouh common enemy. In youh place, Mistuh Ballard, I should probably have done precisely the same thing—only I'm not sure I should have saved the old cattleman's property afte' the fact. Try one of these conchas, suh—unless youh prefer youh pipe. One man in Havana has been making them for me for the past ten yeahs."

Ballard took the gold-banded cigar as one who, having taken a man's coat, takes his cloak, also. There seemed to be no limit to the colonel's kindliness and chivalric generosity; and more than ever he doubted the old cattle king's complicity, even by implication, in any of the mysterious fatalities which had fallen upon the rank and file of the irrigation company's industrial army.

Strolling out under the electric globes, he found that his colloquy with the colonel had cost him a possible chance of a *tête-à-tête* with Elsa. She was swinging gently in her own particular corner ham-

mock; but this time it was Bigelow, instead of Wingfield, who was holding her tiny coffee cup. It was after Ballard had joined the group of which the sweet-voiced Aunt June was the centre, that Miss Craigmiles said to her coffee-holder:

"I am taking you at your sister's valuation and trusting you very fully, Mr. Bigelow. You are quite sure you were followed, you and Mr. Ballard, on the day before the dynamiting of the canal?"

"No; I merely suspected it. I wasn't sure enough to warrant me in calling Ballard's attention to the single horseman who seemed to be keeping us in view. But in the light of later events——"

"Yes; I know," she interrupted hastily. "Were you near enough to identify the man if—if you should see him again?"

"Oh, no. Most of the time he was a mere galloping dot in the distance. Only once—it was when Ballard and I had stopped to wrangle over a bit of deforesting vandalism on the part of the contractors—I saw him fairly as he drew rein on a hilltop in our rear."

"Describe him for me," she directed, briefly.

"I'm afraid I can't do that. I had only this one near-by glimpse of him, you know. But I remarked that he was riding a large horse, like one of those in your father's stables; that he sat straight

in the saddle; and that he was wearing some kind of a skirted coat that blew out behind him when he wheeled to face the breeze."

Miss Craigmiles sat up in the hammock and pressed her fingers upon her closed eyes. When she spoke again after the lapse of a long minute, it was to ask Bigelow to retell the story of the brief fight in the darkness at the sand arroyo on the night of the explosion.

The Forestry man went over the happenings of the night, and of the day following, circumstantially, while the growing moon tilted like a silver shallop in a sea of ebony toward the distant Elks, and the groups and pairs on the broad portico rearranged themselves choir-wise to sing hymns for which one of the Cantrell sisters went to the piano beyond the open windows of the drawing-room to play the accompaniments.

When the not too harmonious chorus began to drone upon the windless night air, Miss Craigmiles came out of her fit of abstraction and thanked Bigelow for his patience with her.

"It isn't altogether morbid curiosity on my part," she explained, half pathetically. "Some day I may be able to tell you just what it is—but not to-night. Now you may go and rescue Madge from the major, who has been 'H'm-ha-ing' her to extinction for the last half-hour. And if you're

brave enough you may tell Mr. Ballard that his bass is something dreadful—or send him here and I'll tell him."

The open-eyed little ruse worked like a piece of well-oiled mechanism, and Ballard broke off in the middle of a verse to go and drag Bigelow's deserted chair to within murmuring distance of the hammock.

"You were singing frightfully out of tune," she began, in mock petulance. "Didn't you know it?"

"I took it for granted," he admitted, cheerfully. "I was never known to sing any other way. My musical education has been sadly neglected."

She looked up with the alert little side turn of the head that always betokened a shifting of moods or of mind scenery.

"Mr. Bromley's hasn't," she averred. "He sings well, and plays the violin like a master. Doesn't he ever play for you?"

Ballard recalled, with a singular and quite unaccountable pricking of impatience, that once before, when the conditions were curiously similar, she had purposefully turned the conversation upon Bromley. But he kept the impatience out of his reply.

"No; as a matter of fact, we have seen very little of each other since I came on the work."

"He is a dear boy." She said it with the exact

shade of impersonality which placed Bromley on the footing of a kinsman of the blood; but Ballard's handicap was still distorting his point of view.

"I am glad you like him," he said; his tone implying the precise opposite of the words.

"Are you? You don't say it very enthusiastically."

It was a small challenge, and he lifted it almost roughly.

"I can't be enthusiastic where your liking for other men is concerned."

Her smile was a mere face-lighting of mockery.

"I can't imagine Mr. Bromley saying a thing like that. What was it you told me once about the high plane of men-friendships? As I remember it, you said that they were the purest passions the world has ever known. And you wouldn't admit that women could breathe the rarefied air of that high altitude at all."

"That was before I knew all the possibilities; before I knew what it means to——"

"Don't say it," she interrupted, the mocking mood slipping from her like a cast-off garment.

"I shall say it," he went on doggedly. "Loudon is nearer to me than any other man I ever knew. But I honestly believe I should hate him if—tell me that it isn't so, Elsa. For heaven's

sake, help me to kill out this new madness before it makes a scoundrel of me!"

What she would have said he was not to know. Beyond the zone of light bounded by the shadows of the maples on the lawn there were sounds as of some animal crashing its way through the shrubbery. A moment later, out of the enclosing walls of the night, came a man, running and gasping for breath. It was one of the labourers from the camp at Elbow Canyon, and he made for the corner of the portico where Miss Craigmiles's hammock was swung.

"'Tis Misther Ballard I'm lukin' for!" he panted; and Ballard answered quickly for himself.

"I'm here," he said. "What's wanted?"

"It's Misther Bromley, this time, sorr. The wather was risin' in the river, and he'd been up to the wing dam just below this to see was there anny logs or annything cloggin' it. On the way up or back, we don't know which, he did be stoomblin' from the trail into the canyon; and the dago, Lu'gi, found him." The man was mopping his face with a red bandana, and his hands were shaking as if he had an ague fit.

"Is he badly hurt?" Ballard had put himself quickly between the hammock and the bearer of ill tidings.

"'Tis kilt dead entirely he is, sorr, we're thinkin'," was the low-spoken reply. The assistant engineer had no enemies among the workmen at the headquarters' camp.

Ballard heard a horrified gasp behind him, and the hammock suddenly swung empty. When he turned, Elsa was hurrying out through the open French window with his coat and hat.

"You must not lose a moment," she urged. "Don't wait for anything—I'll explain to father and Aunt June. Hurry! hurry! but, oh, do be careful—*careful!*"

Ballard dropped from the edge of the portico and plunged into the shrubbery at the heels of the messenger. The young woman, still pale and strangely perturbed, hastened to find her aunt.

"What is it, child? What has happened?"

Miss Cauffrey, the gentle-voiced, had been dozing in her chair, but she wakened quickly when Elsa spoke to her.

"It is another—accident; at the construction camp. Mr. Ballard had to go immediately. Where is father?"

Miss Cauffrey put up her eye-glasses and scanned the various groups within eye-reach. Then she remembered. "Oh, yes; I think I must be very sleepy, yet. He went in quite a little time ago; to the library to lie down. He asked

me to call him when Mr. Ballard was ready to go."

"Are you sure of that, Aunt June?"

"Why—yes. No, that wasn't it, either; he asked me to excuse him to Mr. Ballard. I recollect now. Dear me, child! What has upset you so? You look positively haggard."

But Elsa had fled; first to the library, which was empty, and then to her father's room above stairs. That was empty, too, but the coat and waistcoat her father had worn earlier in the evening were lying upon the bed as if thrown aside hurriedly. While she was staring panic-stricken at the mute evidences of his absence she heard his step in the corridor. When he came in, less familiar eyes than those of his daughter would scarcely have recognised him. He was muffled to the heels in a long rain-coat, the muscles of his face were twitching, and he was breathing hard like a spent runner.

"Father!" she called, softly; but he either did not hear or did not heed. He had flung the rain-coat aside and was hastily struggling into the evening dress. When he turned from the dressing-mirror she could hardly keep from crying out. With the swift change of raiment he had become himself again; and a few minutes later, when she had followed him to the library to find him lying

quietly upon the reading-lounge, half-asleep, as it seemed, the transformation scene in the upper room became more than ever like the fleeting impression of an incredible dream.

"Father, are you asleep?" she asked; and when he sat up quickly she told him her tidings without preface.

"Mr. Bromley is hurt—fatally, they think—by a fall from the path into the lower canyon. Mr. Ballard has gone with the man who came to bring the news. Will you send Otto in the car to see if there is anything we can do?"

"Bromley? Oh, no, child; it can't be *Bromley!*" He had risen to his feet at her mention of the name, but now he sat down again as if the full tale of the years had smitten him suddenly. Then he gave his directions, brokenly, and with a curious thickening of the deep-toned, mellifluous voice: "Tell Otto to bring the small car around at—at once, and fetch me my coat. Of cou'se, my deah, I shall go myself"—this in response to her swift protest. "I'm quite well and able; just a little—a little sho'tness of breath. Fetch me my coat and the doctor-box, thah's a good girl. But—but I assure you it can't be—Bromley!"

The muscles of his face were twitching, and he was breathing hard, like a spent runner

XVI

THE RETURN OF THE OMEN

LOUDON BROMLEY'S principal wounding was a pretty seriously broken head, got, so said Luigi, the Tuscan river-watchman who had found and brought him in, by the fall from the steep hill path into the rocky canyon.

Ballard reached the camp at the heels of the Irish newsbearer shortly after the unconscious assistant had been carried up to the adobe headquarters; and being, like most engineers with field experience, a rough-and-ready amateur surgeon, he cleared the room of the throng of sympathising and utterly useless stone "buckies," and fell to work. But beyond cleansing the wound and telegraphing by way of Denver to Aspen for skilled help, there was little he could do.

The telegraphing promised nothing. Cutting out all the probable delays, and assuming the Aspen physician's willingness to undertake a perilous night gallop over a barely passable mountain trail, twelve hours at the very shortest must go to the covering of the forty miles.

Ballard counted the slow beats of the fluttering pulse and shook his head despairingly. Since he had lived thus long after the accident, Bromley might live a few hours longer. But it seemed much more likely that the flickering candle of life might go out with the next breath. Ballard was unashamed when the lights in the little bunk-room grew dim to his sight, and a lump came in his throat. Jealousy, if the sullen self-centring in the sentimental affair had grown to that, was quenched in the upwelling tide of honest grief. For back of the sex-selfishness, and far more deeply rooted, was the strong passion of brother-loyalty, reawakened now and eager to make amends—to be given a chance to make amends—for the momentary lapse into egoism.

To the Kentuckian in this hour of keen misery came an angel of comfort in the guise of his late host, the master of Castle 'Cadia. There was the stuttering staccato of a motor-car breasting the steep grade of the mesa hill, the drumming of the released engines at the door of the adobe, and the colonel entered, followed by Jerry Blacklock, who had taken the chauffeur's place behind the pilot wheel for the roundabout drive from Castle 'Cadia. In professional silence, and with no more than a nod to the watcher at the bedside, the first gentleman of Arcadia laid off his coat, opened a kit of

surgeon's tools, and proceeded to save Bromley's life, for the time being, at least, by skilfully lifting the broken bone which was slowly pressing him to death.

"Thah, suh," he said, the melodious voice filling the tin-roofed shack until every resonant thing within the mud-brick walls seemed to vibrate in harmonious sympathy, "thah, suh; what mo' there is to do needn't be done to-night. To-morrow morning, Mistuh Ballard, you'll make a right comfo'table litter and have him carried up to Castle 'Cadia, and among us all we'll try to ansuh for him. Not a word, my deah suh; it's only what that deah boy would do for the most wo'thless one of us. I tell you, Mistuh Ballard, we've learned to think right much of Loudon; yes, suh—right much."

Ballard was thankful, and he said so. Then he spoke of the Aspen-aimed telegram.

"Countehmand it, suh; countehmand it," was the colonel's direction. "We'll pull him through without calling in the neighbuhs. Living heah, in such—ah—close proximity to youh man-mangling institutions, I've had experience enough durin' the past year or so to give me standing as a regular practitioneh; I have, for a fact, suh." And his mellow laugh was like the booming of bees among the clover heads.

"I don't doubt it in the least," acknowledged

Ballard; and then he thanked young Blacklock for coming.

"It was up to me, wasn't it, Colonel Craigmiles?" said the collegian. "Otto—Otto's the house-shover, you know—flunked his job; said he wouldn't be responsible for anybody's life if he had to drive that road at speed in the night. We drove it all right, though, didn't we, Colonel? And we'll drive it back."

The King of Arcadia put a hand on Ballard's shoulder and pointed an appreciative finger at Blacklock.

"That young cub, suh, hasn't any mo' horse sense than one of youh Dago mortah-mixers; but the way he drives a motor-car is simply scandalous! Why, suh, if my hair hadn't been white when we started, it would have tu'ned on me long befo' we made the loop around Dump Mountain."

Ballard went to the door with the two Good Samaritans, saw the colonel safely settled in the runabout, and let his gaze follow the winding course of the little car until the dodging tail-light had crossed the temporary bridge below the camp, to be lost among the shoulders of the opposite hills. The elder Fitzpatrick was at his elbow when he turned to go in.

"There's hope f'r the little man, Misther Ballard?" he inquired anxiously.

"Good hope, now, I think, Michael."

"That's the brave wor-rd. The min do be sittin' up in th' bunk-shanties to hear ut. 'Twas all through the camp the minut' they brought him in. There isn't a man av thim that wouldn't go t'rough fire and wather f'r Misther Bromley—and that's no joke. Is there annything I can do?"

"Nothing, thank you. Tell the yard watchman to stay within call, and I'll send for you if you're needed."

With this provision for the possible need, the young chief kept the vigil alone, sitting where he could see the face of the still unconscious victim of fate, or tramping three steps and a turn in the adjoining office room when sleep threatened to overpower him.

It was a time for calm second thought; for a reflective weighing of the singular and ominous conditions partly revealed in the week agone talk with Elsa Craigmiles. That she knew more than she was willing to tell had been plainly evident in that first evening on the tree-pillared portico at Castle 'Cadia; but beyond this assumption the unanswerable questions clustered quickly, opening door after door of speculative conjecture in the background.

What was the motive behind the hurled stone which had so nearly bred a tragedy on his first even-

ing at Elbow Canyon? He reflected that he had always been too busy to make personal enemies; therefore, the attempt upon his life must have been impersonal—must have been directed at the chief engineer of the Arcadia Company. Assuming this, the chain of inference linked itself rapidly. Was Macpherson's death purely accidental?—or Braithwaite's? If not, who was the murderer?—and why was the colonel's daughter so evidently determined to shield him?

The answer, the purely logical answer, pointed to one man—her father—and thereupon became a thing to be scoffed at. It was more than incredible; it was blankly unthinkable.

The young Kentuckian, descendant of pioneers who had hewn their beginnings out of the primitive wilderness, taking life as they found it, was practical before all things else. Villains of the Borgian strain no longer existed, save in the unreal world of the novelist or the play-writer. And if, by any stretch of imagination, they might still be supposed to exist. . . .

Ballard brushed the supposition impatiently aside when he thought of the woman he loved.

"Anything but that!" he exclaimed, breaking the silence of the four bare walls for the sake of hearing the sound of his own voice. "And, besides, the colonel himself is a living, breathing

refutation of any such idiotic notion. All the same, if it is not her father she is trying to shield, who, in the name of all that is good, can it be? And why should Colonel Craigmiles, or anyone else, be so insanely vindictive as to imagine that the killing of a few chiefs of construction will cut any figure with the company which hires them?"

These perplexing questions were still unanswered when the graying dawn found him dozing in his chair, with the camp whistles sounding the early turn-out, and Bromley conscious and begging feebly for a drink of water.

XVII

THE DERRICK FUMBLES

BROMLEY had been a week in hospital at the great house in the upper valley, and was recovering as rapidly as a clean-living, well-ancestored man should, when Ballard was surprised one morning by a descent of the entire Castle 'Cadia garrison, lacking only the colonel and Miss Caufrey, upon the scene of activities at the dam.

The chief of construction had to flog himself sharply into the hospitable line before he could make the invaders welcome. He had a workingman's shrewd impatience of interruptions; and since the accident which had deprived him of his assistant, he had been doing double duty. On this particular morning he was about to leave for a flying round of the camps on the railroad extension; but he reluctantly countermanded the order for the locomotive when he saw Elsa picking the way for her guests among the obstructions in the stone yard.

"Please—oh, please don't look so inhospitable!"

she begged, in well-simulated dismay, when the irruption of sight-seers had fairly surrounded him. "We have driven and fished and climbed mountains and played children's games at home until there was positively nothing else to do. Pacify him, Cousin Janet—he's going to warn us off!"

Ballard laughingly disclaimed any such ungracious intention, and proceeded to prove his words by deeds. Young Blacklock and Bigelow were easily interested in the building details; the women were given an opportunity to see the inside workings of the men's housekeeping in the shacks, the mess-tent and the camp kitchen; the major was permitted and encouraged to be loftily critical of everything; and Wingfield—but Ballard kept the playwright carefully tethered in a sort of moral hitching-rope, holding the end of the rope in his own hands.

Once openly committed as entertainer, the young Kentuckian did all that could be expected of him —and more. When the visitors had surfeited themselves on concrete-mixing and stone-laying and camp housekeeping, the chief engineer had plank seats placed on a flat car, and the invaders were whisked away on an impromptu and personally conducted railway excursion to some of the nearer ditch camps.

Before leaving the headquarters, Ballard gave

Fitzpatrick an Irish hint; and when the excursionists returned from the railway jaunt, there was a miraculous luncheon served in the big mess-tent. Garou, the French-Canadian camp cook, had a soul above the bare necessities when the occasion demanded; and he had Ballard's private commissary to draw upon.

After the luncheon Ballard let his guests scatter as they pleased, charging himself, as before, particularly with the oversight and wardenship of Mr. Lester Wingfield. There was only one chance in a hundred that the playwright, left to his own devices, might stumble upon the skeleton in the camp closet. But the Kentuckian was determined to make that one chance ineffective.

Several things came of the hour spent as Wingfield's keeper while the others were visiting the wing dam and the quarry, the spillway, and the cut-off tunnel, under Fitzpatrick as megaphonist. One of them was a juster appreciation of the playwright as a man and a brother. Ballard smiled mentally when he realised that his point of view had been that of the elemental lover, jealous of a possible rival. Wingfield was not half a bad sort, he admitted; a little inclined to pose, since it was his art to epitomise a world of *poseurs;* an enthusiast in his calling; but at bottom a workable companion and the shrewdest of observers.

In deference to the changed point of view, the Kentuckian did penance for the preconceived prejudice and tried to make the playwright's insulation painless. The sun shone hot on the stone yard, and there was a jar of passable tobacco in the office adobe: would Wingfield care to go indoors and lounge until the others came to a proper sense of the desirability of shade and quietude on a hot afternoon?

Wingfield would, gladly. He confessed shamelessly to a habit of smoking his after-luncheon pipe on his back. There was a home-made divan in the office quarters, with cushions and blanket coverings, and Ballard found the tobacco-jar and a clean pipe; a long-stemmed "churchwarden," dear to the heart of a lazy man.

"Now this is what I call solid comfort," said the playwright, stretching his long legs luxuriously on the divan. "A man's den that is a den, and not a bric-a-brac shop masquerading under the name, a good pipe, good tobacco, and good company. You fellows have us world-people faded to a shadow when it comes to the real thing. I've felt it in my bones all along that I was missing the best part of this trip by not getting in with you down here. But every time I've tried to break away, something else has turned up."

Ballard was ready with his bucket of cold water.

"You haven't missed anything. There isn't much in a construction camp to invite the literary mind, I should say." And he tried to make the saying sound not too inhospitable.

"Oh, you're off wrong, there," argued the playwright, with cheerful arrogance. "You probably haven't a sense of the literary values; a good many people haven't—born blind on that side, you know. Now, Miss Van Bryck has the seeing eye, to an educated finish. She tells me you have a dramatic situation down here every little so-while. She told me that story of yours about the stone smashing into your office in the middle of the night. That's simply ripping good stuff—worlds of possibilities in a thing like that, don't you know? By the way, this is the room, isn't it? Does that patch in the ceiling cover the hole?"

Ballard admitted the fact, and strove manfully to throw the switch ahead of the querist to the end that the talk might be shunted to some less dangerous topic.

"Hang the tobacco!" snapped the guest irritably, retorting upon Ballard's remark about the quality of his pet smoking mixture. "You and Miss Craigmiles seem to be bitten with the same exasperating mania for subject-changing. I'd like to hear that rock-throwing story at first hands, if you don't mind."

Having no good reason for refusing point-blank, Ballard told the story, carefully divesting it of all the little mystery thrills which he had included for Miss Dosia's benefit.

"Um!" commented Wingfield, at the close of the bald narration. "It would seem to have lost a good bit in the way of human interest since Miss Van Bryck repeated it to me. Did you embroider it for her? or did she put in the little hemstitchings for me?"

Ballard laughed.

"I am sorry if I have spoiled it for you. But you couldn't make a dramatic situation out of a careless quarryman's overloading of a shot-hole."

"Oh, no," said the playwright, apparently giving it up. And he smoked his pipe out in silence.

Ballard thought the incident was comfortably dead and buried, but he did not know his man. Long after Wingfield might be supposed to have forgotten all about the stone catapulting, he sat up suddenly and broke out again.

"Say! you explained to Miss Dosia that the stone couldn't possibly have come from the quarry without knocking the science of artillery into a cocked hat. She made a point of that."

"Oh, hold on!" protested the Kentuckian. "You mustn't hold me responsible for a bit of dinner-table talk with a very charming young

woman. Perhaps Miss Dosia wished to be mystified. I put it to you as man to man; would you have disappointed her?"

The playwright's laugh showed his fine teeth.

"They tell me you are at the top of the heap in your profession, Mr. Ballard, and I can easily believe it. But I have a specialty, too, and I'm no slouch in it. My little stunt is prying into the inner consciousness of things. Obviously, there is a mystery—a real mystery—about this stone-throwing episode, and for some reason you are trying to keep me from dipping into it. Conversely, I'd like to get to the bottom of it. Tell me frankly, is there any good reason why I shouldn't?"

Ballard's salvation for this time personified itself in the figure of Contractor Fitzpatrick darkening the door of the office to ask a "question of information," as he phrased it. Hence there was an excuse for a break and a return to the sun-kissed stone yard.

The engineer purposefully prolonged the talk with Fitzpatrick until the scattered sight-seers had gathered for a descent, under Jerry Blacklock's lead, to the great ravine below the dam where the river thundered out of the cut-off tunnel. But when he saw that Miss Craigmiles had elected to stay behind, and that Wingfield had attached himself to the younger Miss Cantrell, he gave the con-

tractor his information boiled down into a curt sentence or two, and hastened to join the stay-behind.

"You'll melt, out here in the sun," he said, overtaking her as she stood looking down into the whirling vortex made by the torrent's plunge into the entrance of the cut-off tunnel.

She ignored the care-taking phrase as if she had not heard it.

"Mr. Wingfield?—you have kept him from getting interested in the—in the——"

Ballard nodded.

"He is interested, beyond doubt. But for the present moment I have kept him from adding anything to Miss Dosia's artless gossip. Will you permit me to suggest that it was taking rather a long chance?—your bringing him down here?"

"I know; but I couldn't help it. Dosia would have brought him on your invitation. I did everything I could think of to obstruct; and when they had beaten me, I made a party affair of it. You'll have to forgive me for spoiling an entire working day for you."

"Since it has given me a chance to be with you, I'm only too happy in losing the day," he said; and he meant it. But he let her know the worst in the other matter in an added sentence. "I'm afraid

the mischief is done in Wingfield's affair, in spite of everything."

"How?" she asked, and the keen anxiety in the grey eyes cut him to the heart.

He told her briefly of the chance arousing of Wingfield's curiosity, and of the playwright's expressed determination to fathom the mystery of the table-smashing stone. Her dismay was pathetic.

"You should never have taken him into your office," she protested reproachfully. "He was sure to be reminded of Dosia's story there."

"I didn't foresee that, and he was beginning to gossip with the workmen. I knew it wouldn't be long before he would get the story of the happenings out of the men—with all the garnishings."

"You *must* find a way to stop him," she insisted "If you could only know what terrible consequences are wrapped up in it!"

He waited until a stone block, dangling in the clutch of the derrick-fall above its appointed resting-place on the growing wall of masonry, had been lowered into the cement bed prepared for it before he said, soberly: "That is the trouble—I *don't* know. And, short of quarrelling outright with Wingfield, I don't think of any effective way of muzzling him."

"No; you mustn't do that. There is misery

enough and enmity enough, without making any more. I'll try to keep him away."

"You will fail," he prophesied, with conviction. "Mr. Wingfield calls himself a builder of plots; but I can assure you from this one day's observation of him that he would much rather unravel a plot than build one."

She was silent while the workmen were swinging another great stone out over the canyon chasm. The shadow of the huge derrick-boom swept around and across them, and she shuddered as if the intangible thing had been an icy finger to touch her.

"You must help me," she pleaded. "I cannot see the way a single step ahead."

"And I am in still deeper darkness," he reminded her gently. "You forget that I do not know what threatens you, or how it threatens."

"I can't tell you; I can't tell any one," she said; and he made sure there was a sob at the catching of her breath.

As once before, he grew suddenly masterful.

"You are wronging yourself and me, Elsa, dear. You forget that your trouble is mine; that in the end we two shall be one in spite of all the obstacles that a crazy fate can invent."

She shook her head. "I told you once that you must not forget yourself again; and you are for-

getting. There is one obstacle which can never be overcome this side of the grave. You must always remember that."

"I remember only that I love you," he dared; adding: "And you are afraid to tell me what this obstacle is. You know it would vanish in the telling."

She did not answer.

"You won't tell me that you are in love with Wingfield?" he persisted.

Still no reply.

"Elsa, dearest, can you look me in the eyes and tell me that you do not love *me?*"

She neither looked nor denied.

"Then that is all I need to know at present," he went on doggedly. "I shall absolutely and positively refuse to recognise any other obstacle."

She broke silence so swiftly that the words seemed to leap to her lips.

"There is one, dear friend," she said, with a warm upflash of strong emotion; "one that neither you nor I, nor any one can overcome!" She pointed down at the boulder-riven flood churning itself into spray in the canyon pot at their feet. "I will measure it for you—and for myself, God help us! Rather than be your wife—the mother of your children—I should gladly, joyfully, fling myself into that."

The motion he made to catch her, to draw her back from the brink of the chasm, was purely mechanical, but it served to break the strain of a situation that had become suddenly impossible.

"That was almost tragic, wasn't it?" she asked, with a swift retreat behind the barricades of mockery. "In another minute we should have tumbled headlong into melodrama, with poor Mr. Wingfield hopelessly out of reach for the note-taking process."

"Then you didn't mean what you were saying?" he demanded, trying hard to overtake the fleeing realities.

"I did, indeed; don't make me say it again. The lights are up, and the audience might be looking. See how manfully Mr. Bigelow is trying not to let Cousin Janet discover how she is crushing him!"

Out of the lower ravine the other members of the party were straggling, with Bigelow giving first aid to a breathless and panting Mrs. Van Bryck, and Wingfield and young Blacklock helping first one and then another of the four younger women. The workmen in the cutting yard were preparing to swing a third massive face-block into place on the dam; and Miss Craigmiles, quite her serene self again, was asking to be shown how the grappling hooks were made fast in the process of "toggling."

Ballard accepted his defeat with what philosophy he could muster, and explained the technical detail. Then the others came up, and the buckboards sent down from Castle 'Cadia to take the party home were seen wheeling into line at the upper end of the short foothill canyon.

"There is our recall at last, Mr. Ballard," gasped the breathless chaperon, "and I daresay you are immensely relieved. But you mustn't be too sorry for your lost day. We have had a perfectly lovely time."

"Such a delightful day!" echoed the two sharers of the common Christian name in unison; and the king's daughter added demurely: "Don't you see we are all waiting for you to ask us to come again, Mr. Ballard?"

"Oh, certainly; any time," said Ballard, coming to the surface. Notwithstanding, on the short walk up to the waiting buckboards he sank into the sea of perplexity again. Elsa's moods had always puzzled him. If they were not real, as he often suspected, they were artistically perfect imitations; and he was never quite sure that he could distinguish between the real and the simulated.

As at the present moment: the light-hearted young woman walking beside him up the steep canyon path was the very opposite of the sorely tried and anxious one who had twice let him see

the effects of the anxiety, however carefully she concealed the cause.

The perplexed wonder was still making him half abstracted when he put himself in the way to help her into one of the homeward-headed vehicles. They were a little in advance of the others, and when she faced him to say good-bye, he saw her eyes. Behind the smile in them the trouble shadows were still lurking; and when the heartening word was on his lips they looked past him, dilating suddenly with a great horror.

"Look!" she cried, pointing back to the dam; and when he wheeled he saw that they were all looking; standing agape as if they had been shown the Medusa's head. The third great stone had been swung out over the dam, and, little by little, with jerkings that made the wire cables snap and sing, the grappling-hooks were losing their hold in mid-air. The yells of the workmen imperilled rose sharply above the thunder of the river, and the man at the winding-drums seemed to have lost his nerve and his head.

Young Blacklock, who was taking an engineering course in college, turned and ran back down the path, shouting like a madman. Ballard made a megaphone of his hands and bellowed an order to the unnerved hoister engineer. "Lower away! Drop it, you blockhead!" he shouted; but the

command came too late. With a final jerk the slipping hooks gave way, and the three-ton cube of granite dropped like a huge projectile, striking the stonework of the dam with a crash like an explosion of dynamite.

Dosia Van Bryck's shriek was ringing in Ballard's ears, and the look of frozen horror on Elsa's face was before his eyes, when he dashed down the steep trail at Blacklock's heels. Happily, there was no one killed; no one seriously hurt. On the dam-head Fitzpatrick was climbing to a point of vantage to shout the news to the yard men clustering thickly on the edge of the cliff above, and Ballard went only far enough to make sure that there had been no loss of life. Then he turned and hastened back to the halted buckboards.

"Thank God, it's only a money loss, this time!" he announced. "The hooks held long enough to give the men time to get out of the way."

"There was no one hurt? Are you sure there was no one hurt?" panted Mrs. Van Bryck, fanning herself vigorously.

"No one at all. I'm awfully sorry we had to give you such a shock for your leave-taking, but accidents will happen, now and then. You will excuse me if I go at once? There is work to be done."

"H'm—ha! One moment, Mr. Ballard," rasped

the major, swelling up like a man on the verge of apoplexy. But Mrs. Van Bryck was not to be set aside.

"Oh, certainly, we will excuse you. Please don't waste a moment on us. You shouldn't have troubled to come back. So sorry—it was very dreadful—terrible!"

While the chaperon was groping for her misplaced self-composure, Wingfield said a word or two to Dosia, who was his seat-mate, and sprang to the ground.

"Hold on a second, Ballard!" he called. "I'm going with you. What you need right now is a trained investigator, and I'm your man. Great Scott! to think that a thing like that should happen, and I should be here to see it!" And then to Miss Craigmiles, who appeared to be trying very earnestly to dissuade him: "Oh, no, Miss Elsa; I sha'n't get underfoot or be in Mr. Ballard's way; and you needn't trouble to send down for me. I can pad home on my two feet, later on."

XVIII

THE INDICTMENT

IN the days following the episode of the tumbling granite block, Wingfield came and went unhindered between Castle 'Cadia and the construction camp at Elbow Canyon, sometimes with Jerry Blacklock for a companion, but oftener alone. Short of the crude expedient of telling him that his room was more to be desired than his company, Ballard could think of no pretext for excluding him; and as for keeping him in ignorance of the linked chain of accidents and tragedies, it was to be presumed that his first unrestricted day among the workmen had put him in possession of all the facts with all their exaggerations.

How deeply the playwright was interested in the tale of disaster and mysterious ill luck, no one knew precisely; not even young Blacklock, who was systematically sounded, first by Miss Craigmiles, and afterward at regular intervals by Ballard. As Blacklock saw it, Wingfield was merely killing time at the construction camp. When he

was not listening to the stories of the men off duty, or telling them equally marvellous stories of his own, he was lounging in the adobe bungalow, lying flat on his back on the home-made divan with his clasped hands for a pillow, smoking Ballard's tobacco, or sitting in one of the lazy-chairs and reading with apparent avidity and the deepest abstraction one or another of Bromley's dry-as-dust text-books on the anatomy of birds and the taxidermic art.

"Whatever it is that you are dreading in connection with Wingfield and the camp 'bogie' isn't happening," Ballard told the king's daughter one morning when he came down from Bromley's hospital room at Castle 'Cadia and found Elsa waiting for him under the portières of the darkened library. "For a man who talks so feelingly about the terrible drudgery of literary work, your playwriter is certainly a striking example of simon-pure laziness. He is perfectly innocuous. When he isn't half asleeep on my office lounge, or dawdling among the masons or stone-cutters, he is reading straight through Bromley's shelf of bird-books. He may be absorbing 'local color,' but if he is, he is letting the environment do all the work. I don't believe he has had a consciously active idea since he began loafing with us."

"You are mistaken—greatly mistaken," was all

she would say; and in the fulness of time a day came when the event proved how far a woman's intuition may outrun a man's reasoning.

It was the occasion of Bromley's first return to the camp at Elbow Canyon, four full weeks after the night of stumbling on the steep path. Young Blacklock had driven him by the roundabout road in the little motor-car; and the camp industries paused while the men gave the "Little Boss" an enthusiastic ovation. Afterward, the convalescent was glad enough to lie down on the makeshift lounge in the office bungalow; but when Jerry would have driven him back in time for luncheon at Castle 'Cadia, as his strict orders from Miss Elsa ran, Bromley begged to be allowed to put his feet under the office mess-table with his chief and his volunteer chauffeur.

To the three, doing justice to the best that Garou could find in the camp commissary stores, came Mr. Lester Wingfield, to drag up a stool and to make himself companionably at home at the engineers' mess, as his custom had come to be. Until the meal was ended and the pipes were filled, he was silent and abstracted to the edge of rudeness. But when Ballard made a move to go down to the railroad yard with Fitzpatrick, the spell was broken.

"Hold up a minute; don't rush off so frantic-

ally," he cut in abruptly. "I have been waiting for many days to get you and Bromley together for a little confidential confab about matters and things, and the time has come. Sit down."

Ballard resumed his seat at the table with an air of predetermined patience, and the playwright nodded approval. "That's right," he went on, "brace yourself to take it as it comes; but you needn't write your reluctance so plainly in your face. It's understood."

"I don't know what you mean," objected Ballard, not quite truthfully.

Wingfield laughed.

"You didn't want me to come down here at first; and since I've been coming you haven't been too excitedly glad to see me. But that's all right, too. It's what the public benefactor usually gets for butting in. Just the same, there is a thing to be done, and I've got to do it. I may bore you both in the process, but I have reached a point where a pow-wow is a shrieking necessity. I have done one of two things: I've unearthed the most devilish plot that ever existed, or else I have stumbled into a mare's nest of fairly heroic proportions."

By this time he was reasonably sure of his audience. Bromley, still rather pallid and weak, squared himself with an elbow on the table. Blacklock got up to stand behind the assistant's

chair. Ballard thrust his hands into his pockets and frowned. The moment had probably arrived when he would have to fight fire with fire for Elsa Craigmiles's sake, and he was pulling himself together for the battle.

"I know beforehand about what you are going to say," he interjected; "but let's have your version of it."

"You shall have it hot and hot," promised the playwright. "For quite a little time, and from a purely literary point of view, I have been interesting myself in the curious psychological condition which breeds so many accidents on this job of yours. I began with the assumption that there was a basis of reality. The human mind isn't exactly creative in the sense that it can make something out of nothing. You say, Mr. Ballard, that your workmen are superstitious fools, and that their mental attitude is chiefly responsible for all the disasters. I say that the fact—the cause-fact—existed before the superstition; was the legitimate ancestor of the superstition. Don't you believe it?"

Ballard neither affirmed nor denied; but Bromley nodded. "I've always believed it," he admitted.

"There isn't the slightest doubt of the existence of the primary cause-fact; it is a psychological

axiom that it *must* antedate the diseased mental condition," resumed the theorist, oracularly. "I don't know how far back it can be traced, but Engineer Braithwaite's drowning will serve for our starting point. You will say that there was nothing mysterious about that; yet only the other day, Hoskins, the locomotive driver, said to me: 'They can say what they like, but *I* ain't believing that the river stove him all up as if he'd been stomped on in a cattle pen.' There, you see, you have the first gentle push over into the field of the unaccountable."

It was here that Ballard broke in, to begin the fire-fighting.

"You are getting the cart before the horse. It is ten chances to one that Hoskins never dreamed of being incredulous about the plain, unmistakable facts until after the later happenings had given him the superstitious twist."

"The sequence in this particular instance is immaterial—quite immaterial," argued the playwright, with obstinate assurance. "The fact stays with us that there *was* something partly unaccountable in this first tragedy to which the thought of Hoskins—the thoughts of all those who knew the circumstances—could revert."

"Well?" said Ballard.

"It is on this hypothesis that I have constructed

my theory. Casting out all the accidents chargeable to carelessness, to disobedience of orders, or to temporary aberration on the part of the workmen, there still remains a goodly number of them carrying this disturbing atom of mystery. Take Sanderson's case: he came here, I'm told, with a decent record; he was not in any sense of the words a moral degenerate. Yet in a very short time he was killed in a quarrel over a woman at whom the average man wouldn't look twice. Blacklock, here, has seen this woman; but I'd like to ask if either of you two have?"—this to Ballard and the assistant.

Ballard shook his head, and Bromley confessed that he had not.

"Well, Jerry and I have the advantage of you—we have seen her," said Wingfield, scoring the point with a self-satisfied smile. "She is a gray-haired Mexican crone, apparently old enough, and certainly hideous enough, to be the Mexican foreman's mother. I'll venture the assertion that Sanderson never thought of her as a feminine possibility at all."

"Hold on; I shall be obliged to spoil your theory there," interrupted Bromley. "Billy unquestionably put himself in Manuel's hands. He used to go down to the ranch two or three times a week, and he spent money, a good bit of it, on the

woman. I know it, because he borrowed from me. And along toward the last, he never rode in that direction without slinging his Winchester under the stirrup-leather."

"Looking for trouble with Manuel, you would say?" interjected Wingfield.

"No doubt of it. And when the thing finally came to a focus, the Mexican gave Billy a fair show; there were witnesses to that part of it. Manuel told Sanderson to take his gun, which the woman was trying to hide, get on his horse, and ride to the north corner of the corral, where he was to wheel and begin shooting—or be shot in the back. The programme was carried out to the letter. Manuel walked his own horse to the south corner, and the two men wheeled and began to shoot. Three or four shots were fired by each before Billy was hit."

"Um!" said the playwright thoughtfully. "There were witnesses, you say? Some of the Craigmiles cow-boys, I suppose. You took their word for these little details?"

Bromley made a sorrowful face. "No; it was Billy's own story. The poor fellow lived long enough to tell me what I've been passing on to you. He tried to tell me something else, something about Manuel and the woman, but there wasn't time enough."

Wingfield had found the long-stemmed pipe and was filling it from the jar of tobacco on the table. "Was that all?" he inquired.

"All but the finish—which was rather heart-breaking. When he could no longer speak he kept pointing to me and to his rifle, which had been brought in with him. I understood he was trying to tell me that I should keep the gun."

"You did keep it?"

"Yes; I have it yet."

"Let me have a look at it, will you?"

The weapon was found, and Wingfield examined it curiously. "Is it loaded?" he asked.

Bromley nodded. "I guess it is. It hasn't been out of its case or that cupboard since the day of the killing."

The playwright worked the lever cautiously, and an empty cartridge shell flipped out and fell to the floor. "William Sanderson's last shot," he remarked reflectively, and went on slowly pumping the lever until eleven loaded cartridges lay in an orderly row on the table. "You were wrong in your count of the number of shots fired, or else the magazine was not full when Sanderson began," he commented. Then, as Blacklock was about to pick up one of the cartridges: "Hold on, Jerry; don't disturb them, if you please."

Blacklock laughed nervously. "Mr. Wing-

field's got a notion," he said. "He's always getting 'em."

"I have," was the quiet reply. "But first let me ask you, Bromley: What sort of a rifle marksman was Sanderson?"

"One of the best I ever knew. I have seen him drill a silver dollar three times out of five at a hundred yards when he was feeling well. There is your element of mystery again: I could never understand how he missed the Mexican three or four times in succession at less than seventy-five yards—unless Manuel's first shot was the one that hit him. That might have been it. Billy was all sand; the kind of man to go on shooting after he was killed."

"My notion is that he didn't have the slightest chance in the wide world," was Wingfield's comment. "Let us prove or disprove it if we can," and he opened a blade of his penknife and dug the point of it into the bullet of the cartridge first extracted from the dead man's gun. "There is my notion—and a striking example of Mexican fair play," he added, when the bullet, a harmless pellet of white clay, carefully moulded and neatly coated with lead foil, fell apart under the knife-blade.

The playwright's audience was interested now, beyond all question of doubt. If Wingfield had suddenly hypnotised the three who saw this un-

expected confirmation of his theory of treachery in the Sanderson tragedy, the awed silence that fell upon the little group around the table could not have been more profound. It was Bromley who broke the spell, prefacing his exclamation with a mirthless laugh.

"Your gifts of deduction are almost uncanny, Wingfield," he asserted. "How could you reason your way around to that?"—pointing at the clay bullet.

"I didn't," was the calm reply. "Imagination can double discount pure logic in the investigative field, nine times out of ten. And in this instance it wasn't my imagination: it was another man's. I once read a story in which the author made his villain kill a man with this same little trick of sham bullets. I merely remembered the story. Now let us see how many more there are to go with this."

There were four of the cartridges capped with the dummy bullets; the remaining seven being genuine. Wingfield did the sum arithmetical aloud. "Four and five are nine, and nine and seven are sixteen. Sanderson started out that day with a full magazine, we'll assume. He fired five of these dummies—with perfect immunity for Manuel—and here are the other four. If the woman had had a little more time, when she was pretending to hide the gun, she would have

"There is my notion—and a striking example of Mexican fair play"

pumped out all of the good cartridges. Being somewhat hurried, she exchanged only nine, which, in an even game and shot for shot, gave Manuel ten chances to Sanderson's one. It was a cinch."

Ballard sat back in his chair handling the empty rifle. Bromley's pallid face turned gray. The tragedy had touched him very sharply at the time; and this new and unexpected evidence of gross treachery revived all the horror of the day when Sanderson had been carried in and laid upon the office couch to die.

"Poor Billy!" he said. "It was a cold-blooded murder, and he knew it. That was what he was trying to tell me—and couldn't."

"That was my hypothesis from the first," Wingfield asserted promptly. "But the motive seemed to be lacking; it still seems to be lacking. Have either of you two imagination enough to help me out?"

"The motive?" queried Bromley. "Why, that remains the same, doesn't it?—more's the pity."

The playwright had lighted the long-stemmed pipe, and was thoughtfully blowing smoke rings toward the new patch in the bungalow ceiling.

"Not if my theory is to stand, Mr. Bromley. You see, I am proceeding confidently upon the supposition that Sanderson wasn't messing in Manuel's domestic affairs. I can't believe for a

moment that it was a quarrel over the woman, with Manuel's jealousy to account for the killing. It's too absurdly preposterous. Settling that fact to my own complete satisfaction, I began to search for the real motive, and it is for you to say whether I am right or wrong. Tell me: was Sanderson more than casually interested in the details of Braithwaite's drowning? That story must have been pretty fresh and raw in everybody's recollection at that time."

Bromley's rejoinder was promptly affirmative. "It was; and Sanderson *was* interested. As Braithwaite's successor, and with the fight between the company and the colonel transferred to him, he couldn't shirk his responsibility. Now that you recall it, I remember very well that he had notions of his own about Braithwaite's taking off. He was a quiet sort; didn't talk much; but what little he did say gave me to understand that he suspected foul play of some kind. And here's your theory again, Mr. Wingfield: if a hint of what he suspected ever got wind in the camp, it would account for the superstitious twist given to the drowning by Hoskins and the others, wouldn't it?"

Wingfield smote the table with his fist.

"There is your connecting link!" he exclaimed. "We have just proved beyond doubt that Sander-

son wasn't killed in a fair fight: he was murdered, and the murder was carefully planned beforehand. By the same token, Braithwaite was murdered, too! Recall the circumstances as they have been related by the eye-witnesses: when they found the Government man and took him out of the river, his skull was crushed and both arms were broken . . . see here!" he threw himself quickly into the attitude of one fishing from a river-bank. "Suppose somebody creeps up behind me with a club raised to brain me: I get a glimpse of him or his shadow, dodge, fling up my arms, so—and one good, smashing blow does the business. That's all; or all but one little item. Manuel's woman knows who struck that blow, and Sanderson was trying to bribe her to tell."

If the announcement had been an explosion to rock the bungalow on its foundations, the effect could scarcely have been more striking. Ballard flung the empty gun aside and sprang to his feet. The collegian sat down weakly and stared. Bromley's jaw dropped, and he glared across at Wingfield as if the clever deduction were a mortal affront to be crammed down the throat of its originator.

The playwright's smile was the eye-wrinkling of one who prides himself upon the ability to keep his head when others are panic-stricken.

"Seems to knock you fellows all in a heap," he remarked, calmly. "What have you been doing all these months that you haven't dug it out for yourselves?"

Bromley was moistening his lips.

"Go on, Mr. Wingfield, if you please. Tell us all you know—or think you know."

"There is more; a good bit more," was the cool reply. "Three months ago you had a train wreck on the railroad—two men killed. 'Rough track,' was the cause assigned, Mr. Bromley; but that was one time when your cautious chief, Macpherson, fell down. The two surviving trainmen, questioned separately by me within the past week, both say that there were at least inferential proofs of pulled spikes and a loosened rail. A little later one man was killed and two were crippled by the premature explosion of a charge of dynamite in the quarry. Carelessness, this time, on the part of the men involved; and *you* said it, Mr. Bromley. It was nothing of the kind. Some one had substituted a coil of quick-firing fuse for the ordinary slow-match the men had been using, and the thing went off before the cry of 'fire' could be given. How do I know?"

"Yes; how *do* you know?" demanded Bromley.

"By a mere fluke, and not by any process of deduction, in this instance, as it happens. One

of the survivors was crafty enough to steal the coil of substituted fuse, having some vague notion of suing the company for damages for supplying poor material. Like other men of his class, he gave up the notion when he got well of his injuries; but it was revived again the other day when one of his comrades told him I was a lawyer. He made a date with me, told me his tale, and showed me the carefully preserved coil of bad fuse. I cut off a bit of it and did a little experimenting. Look at this." He took a piece of fuse from his pocket, uncoiled it upon the table, and applied a match. It went off like a flash of dry gunpowder, burning through from end to end in a fraction of a second.

"Go on," said Ballard, speaking for the first time since the playwright had begun his unravelling of the tangled threads of disaster.

"We dismiss the quarry catastrophe and come to the fall of a great boulder from the hill-crags on the farther side of the river some two weeks later. This heaven-sent projectile smashed into the dam structure, broke out a chunk of the completed masonry, killed two men outright and injured half a dozen others—correct me if I distort the details, Mr. Bromley. This time there was no investigation worthy of the name, if I have gathered my information carefully enough. Other rocks had fallen from the same slope; and after Fitzpatrick

had assured himself that there were no more likely to fall, the matter was charged off to the accident account. If you and Michael Fitzpatrick had been the typical coroner's jury, Mr. Bromley, you couldn't have been more easily satisfied with purely inferential evidence. I wasn't satisfied until I had climbed painfully to the almost inaccessible ledge from which the boulder had fallen. Once there, however, the 'act of God' became very plainly the act of man. The 'heel' used as a fulcrum in levering the rock from the ledge was still in place; and the man in the case, in his haste or in his indifference to discovery, had left the iron crowbar with which he had pried the stone from its bed. The crowbar is still there."

"Is that all?" asked Bromley, wetting his lips again.

"By no manner of means," was the equable rejoinder. "I could go on indefinitely. The falling derrick may or may not have been aimed specially at Macpherson; but it committed premeditated murder, just the same—the broken guy cable was rotted in two with acid. Again you will demand to know how I know. I satisfied myself by making a few simple tests on the broken ends with chemicals filched out of Colonel Craigmiles's laboratory up yonder in the second story of his electric plant. No; I'm no chemist. But you

will find, when you come to write stories and plays, that a smattering knowledge of every man's trade comes in handy. Otherwise you'll be writing yourself down as a blundering ass in every second paragraph."

Wingfield paused, but it was only to relight his pipe. When the tobacco was burning again he went on, in the same even tone.

"The falling derrick brings us down to your *régime*, Mr. Ballard. I pass by the incident of the hurled stone that made that awkward patch necessary in your ceiling: you yourself have admitted that the stone could not have come from the blasting in the quarry. But there was another railroad accident which deserves mention. No doubt Hoskins has told you what he saw almost on the very spot where Braithwaite's snuffing-out occurred. He thought it was Braithwaite's ghost—he still thinks so. But we are less credulous; or, at least, I was. Like Sanderson, I have been making friends—or enemies—at the Craigmiles cattle ranch. In fact, I was down there the day following Hoskins's misfortune. Curiously enough, there was another man who saw the Braithwaite ghost—one 'Scotty,' a cow-boy. He was night-herding on the ranch bunch of beef cattle on the night of the accident, and he saw the ghost, leather leggings, Norfolk shooting-jacket, and double-visored British cap

all complete, riding a horse down to the river a little while before the train came around the curve. And after the hullabaloo, he saw it again, riding quietly back to the ranch."

Bromley was gripping the edge of the table and exchanging glances with Ballard. It was the Kentuckian who broke the silence which fell upon the group around the table when the playwright made an end.

"Summing it all up, what is your conclusion, Wingfield? You have reached one long before this, I take it."

The amateur Vidocq made a slow sign of assent.

"As I have told you, I went into this thing out of sheer curiosity, and partly because there were obstructions put in my way. That's human nature. But afterward it laid hold of me and held me by its own grip. I'm not sure that there have been any simon-pure accidents at all. So far as I have gone, everything that has happened has been made to happen; has been carefully planned and prepared for in advance by some one of more than ordinary intelligence—and vindictiveness. And, unhappily, the motive is only too painfully apparent. The work on this irrigation project of yours is to be hampered and delayed by all possible means, even to the sacrificing of human life."

Again there was a silence in the thick-walled office room; a silence so strained that the clickings of the stone hammers in the yard and the rasping cacophonies of the hoisting engines at the dam seemed far removed. It was Bromley who spoke first, and his question was pointedly suggestive.

"You haven't stopped with the broad generalisation, Mr. Wingfield?"

"Meaning that I have found the man who is responsible for all these desperate and deadly doings? I am afraid I have. There would seem to be only one man in the world whose personal interests are at stake. Naturally, I haven't gone very deeply into that part of it. But didn't somebody tell me there is a fight on in the courts between the Arcadia Company and Colonel Craigmiles?—a fight in which delay is the one thing needful for the colonel?"

Ballard came back to the table and stood within arm's-reach of the speaker. His square jaw had taken on the fighting angle, and his eyes were cold and hard.

"What are you going to do about it, Mr. Wingfield? Have you arrived at that conclusion, also?"

Wingfield's doubtful glance was in young Blacklock's direction, and his reply was evasive.

"That is a very natural question; but doesn't

it strike you, Mr. Ballard, that this is hardly the time or place to go into it?"

"No."

"Very well . . . Jerry, what we are talking about now is strictly between gentlemen: do you understand?"

"Sure thing," said the collegian.

"You ask me what I am going to do, Mr. Ballard; and in return I'll ask you to put yourself in my place. Clearly, it is a law-abiding citizen's plain duty to go and lay the bald facts before the nearest prosecuting attorney and let the law take its course. On the other hand, I'm only a man like other men, and——"

"And you are Colonel Craigmiles's guest. Go on," said Ballard, straightening the path of hesitation for him.

"That's it," nodded Wingfield. "As you say, I am his guest; and—er—well, there is another reason why I should be the last person in the world to make or meddle. At first, I was brashly incredulous, as any one would be who was mixing and mingling with the colonel in the daily amenities. Later, when the ugly fact persisted and I was obliged to admit it, the personal factor entered the equation. It's bad medicine, any way you decide to take it."

"Still you are not telling us what you mean to

do, Mr. Wingfield," Bromley reminded him gently.

"No; but I don't mind telling you. I have about decided upon a weak sort of compromise. This thing will come out—it's bound to come out in the pretty immediate hence; and I don't want to be here when the sheriff arrives. I think I shall have a very urgent call to go back to New York."

Bromley laid hold of the table and pulled himself to his feet; but it was Ballard who said, slowly, as one who weighs his words and the full import of them: "Mr. Wingfield, you are more different kinds of an ass than I took you to be, and that is saying a great deal. Out of a mass of hearsay, the idle stories of a lot of workmen whose idea of humour has been to make a butt of you, you have built up this fantastic fairy tale. I am charitable enough to believe that you couldn't help it; it is a part of your equipment as a professional maker of fairy tales. But there are two things for which I shall take it upon myself to answer personally. You will not leave Castle 'Cadia until your time is out; and you'll not leave this room until you have promised the three of us that this cock-and-bull story of yours stops right here with its first telling."

"That's so," added Bromley, with a quiet menace in his tone.

It was the playwright's turn to gasp, and he did it, very realistically.

"You—you don't believe it? with all the three-sheet-poster evidence staring you in the face? Why, great Joash! you must be stark, staring mad—both of you!" he raved. And then to Blacklock: "Are you in it, too, Jerry?"

"I guess I am," returned the collegian, meaning no more than that he felt constrained to stand with the men of his chosen profession.

Wingfield drew a long breath and with it regained the impersonal heights of the unemotional observer. "Of course, it is just as you please," he said, carelessly. "I had a foolish notion I was doing you two a good turn; but if you choose to take the other view of it—well, there is no accounting for tastes. Drink your own liquor and give the house a good name. I'll dig up my day-pay later on: it's cracking good material, you know."

"That is another thing," Ballard went on, still more decisively. "If you ever put pen to paper with these crazy theories of yours for a basis, I shall make it my business to hunt you down as I would a wild beast."

"So shall I," echoed Bromley.

Wingfield rose and put the long-stemmed pipe carefully aside.

"You are a precious pair of bally idiots," he re-

marked, quite without heat. Then he looked at his watch and spoke pointedly to Blacklock. "You're forgetting Miss Elsa's fishing party to the upper canyon, aren't you? Suppose we drive around to Castle 'Cadia in the car. You can send Otto back after Mr. Bromley later on." And young Blacklock was so blankly dazed by the cool impudence of the suggestion that he consented and left the bungalow with the playwright.

For some little time after the stuttering purr of the motor-car had died away the two men sat as Wingfield had left them, each busy with his own thoughts. Bromley was absently fingering the cartridges from Sanderson's rifle, mute proofs of the truth of the playwright's theories, and Ballard seemed to have forgotten that he had promised Fitzpatrick to run a line for an additional side-track in the railroad yard.

"Do you blame me, Loudon?" he asked, after the silence had wrought its perfect work.

"No; there was nothing else to do. But I couldn't help being sorry for him."

"So was I," was the instant rejoinder. "Wingfield is all kinds of a decent fellow; and the way he has untangled the thing is nothing short of masterly. But I had to tie his tongue; you know I had to do that, Loudon."

"Of course, you had to."

Silence again for a little space; and then:

"There is no doubt in your mind that he has hit upon the true solution of all the little mysteries?"

Bromley shook his head slowly. "None at all, I am sorry to say. I have suspected it, in part, at least, for a good while. And I had proof positive before Wingfield gave it to us."

"How?" queried Ballard.

Bromley was still fingering the cartridges. "I hate to tell you, Breckenridge. And yet you ought to know," he added. "It concerns you vitally."

Ballard's smile was patient. "I am well past the shocking point," he averred. "After what we have pulled through in the last hour we may as well make a clean sweep of it."

"Well, then; I didn't stumble over the canyon cliff that night four weeks ago: I was knocked over."

"What!"

"It's true."

"And you know who did it?"

"I can make a pretty good guess. While I was down at the wing dam a man passed me, coming from the direction of the great house. He was a big man, and he was muffled to the ears in a rain-coat. I know, because I heard the peculiar 'mackintosh' rustle as he went by me. I knew

then who it was; would have known even if I hadn't had a glimpse of his face at the passing instant. It is one of the colonel's eccentricities never to go out after nightfall—in a bone-dry country, mind you—without wearing a rain-coat."

"Well?" said Ballard.

"He didn't see me, though I thought at first that he did; he kept looking back as if he were expecting somebody to follow him. He took the path on our side of the canyon—the one I took a few minutes later. That's all; except that I would swear that I heard the 'slither' of a mackintosh just as the blow fell that knocked me down and out."

"Heavens, Loudon! It's too grossly unbelievable! Why, man, he saved your life after the fact, risking his own in a mad drive down here from Castle 'Cadia in the car to do it! You wouldn't have lived until morning if he hadn't come."

"It is unbelievable, as you say; and yet it isn't, when you have surrounded all the facts. What is the reason, the only reason, why Colonel Craigmiles should resort to all these desperate expedients?"

"Delay, of course; time to get his legal fight shaped up in the courts."

"Exactly. If he can hold us back long enough, the dam will never be completed. He knows this,

and Mr. Pelham knows it, too. Unhappily for us, the colonel has found a way to ensure the delay. The work can't go on without a chief of construction."

"But, good Lord, Loudon, you're not the 'Big Boss'; and, besides, the man loves you like a son! Why should he try to kill you one minute and move heaven and earth to save your life the next?"

Bromley shook his head sorrowfully.

"That is what made me say what I did about not wanting to tell you, Breckenridge. That crack over the head wasn't meant for me; it was meant for you. If it had not been so dark under the hill that night—but it was; pocket-dark in the shadow of the pines. And he knew you'd be coming along that path on your way back to camp—knew you'd be coming, and wasn't expecting anybody else. Don't you see?"

Ballard jumped up and began to pace the floor.

"My God!" he ejaculated; "I was his guest; I had just broken bread at his table! Bromley, when he went out to lie in wait for me, he left me talking with his daughter! It's too horrible!"

Bromley had stood the eleven cartridges, false and true, in a curving row on the table. The crooking line took the shape of a huge interrogation point.

"Wingfield thought he had solved all the mys-

teries, but the darkest of them remains untouched," he commented. "How can the genial, kindly, magnanimous man we know, or think we know, be such a fiend incarnate?" Then he broke ground again in the old field. "Will you do now what I begged you to do at first?—throw up this cursed job and go away?"

Ballard stopped short in his tramping and his answer was an explosive "No!"

"That is half righteous anger, and half something else. What is the other half, Breckenridge?" And when Ballard did not define it: "I can guess it; it is the same thing that made you stuff Wingfield's theories down his throat a few minutes ago. You are sorry for the daughter."

Through the open door Ballard saw Fitzpatrick coming across the stone yard.

"You've guessed it, Loudon; or rather, I think you have known it all along. I love Elsa Craigmiles; I loved her long before I ever heard of Arcadia or its king. Now you know why Wingfield mustn't be allowed to talk; why I mustn't go away and give place to a new chief who might live to see Elsa's father hanged. She must be spared and defended at any cost. One other word before Fitzpatrick cuts in: When my time comes, if it does come, you and one other man will know how I passed out and why. I want your promise

that you'll keep still, and that you will keep Wingfield still. Blacklock doesn't count."

"Sure," said Bromley, quietly; and then, with the big Irish contractor's shadow fairly darkening the door: "You'll do the same for me, Breckenridge, won't you? Because—oh, confound it all! —I'm in the same boat with you; without a ghost of a show, you understand."

Ballard put his back squarely to Michael Fitzpatrick scraping his feet on the puncheon-floored porch of the bungalow, and gripped Bromley's hand across the table.

"It's a bargain," he declared warmly. "We'll take the long chance and stand by her together, old man. And if she chooses the better part in the end, I'll try not to act like a jealous fool. Now you turn in and lie down a while. I've got to go with Michael."

This time it was Bromley who saved the situation. "What a pair of luminous donkeys we are!" he laughed. "She calls you 'dear friend,' and me 'little brother.' If we're right good and tractable, we may get cards to her wedding—with Wingfield."

XIX

IN THE LABORATORY

BALLARD had a small shock while he was crossing the stone yard with Fitzpatrick. It turned upon the sight of the handsome figure of the Craigmiles ranch foreman calmly rolling a cigarette in the shade of one of the cutting sheds.

"What is the Mexican doing here?" he demanded abruptly of Fitzpatrick; and the Irishman's manner was far from reassuring.

"'Tis you he'll be wanting to see, I'm thinking. He's been hanging 'round the office f'r the betther part of an hour. Shall I run him off the riservation?"

"Around the office, you say?" Ballard cut himself instantly out of the contractor's company and crossed briskly to the shed where the Mexican was lounging. "You are waiting to see me?" he asked shortly, ignoring the foreman's courtly bow and sombrero-sweep.

"I wait to h-ask for the 'ealth of Señor Bromley. It is report' to me that he is recover from hees so-bad h-accident."

"Mr. Bromley is getting along all right. Is that all?"

The Mexican bowed again.

"I bring-a da message from the Señorita to da Señor Wingfiel'. He is som'where on da camp?"

"No; he has gone back to the upper valley. You have been waiting some time? You must have seen him go."

For the third time the Mexican removed his hat. "I'll have been here one, two, t'ree little minute, Señor Ballar'," he lied smoothly. "And now I make to myself the honour of saying to you, *Adios.*"

Ballard let him go because there was nothing else to do. His presence in the construction camp, and the ready lie about the length of his stay, were both sufficiently ominous. What if he had overheard the talk in the office? It was easily possible that he had. The windows were open, and the adobe was only a few steps withdrawn from the busy cutting yard. The eavesdropper might have sat unremarked upon the office porch, if he had cared to.

The Kentuckian was deep in the labyrinth of reflection when he rejoined Fitzpatrick; and the laying-out of the new side-track afterward was purely mechanical. When the work was done, Ballard returned to the bungalow, to find Bromley sleeping the sleep of pure exhaustion on the blan-

ket-covered couch. Obeying a sudden impulse, the Kentuckian took a field-glass from its case on the wall, and went out, tip-toeing to avoid waking Bromley. If Manuel had overheard, it was comparatively easy to prefigure his next step.

"Which way did the Mexican go?" Ballard asked of a cutter in the stone-yard.

"The last I saw of him he was loungin' off towards the Elbow. That was just after you was talkin' to him," said the man, lifting his cap to scratch his head with one finger.

"Did he come here horseback?"

"Not up here on the mesa. Might 'a' left his nag down below; but he wa'n't headin' that way when I saw him."

Ballard turned away and climbed the hill in the rear of the bungalow; the hill from which the table-smashing rock had been hurled. From its crest there was a comprehensive view of the upper valley, with the river winding through it, with Castle 'Cadia crowning the island-like knoll in its centre, with the densely forested background range billowing green and grey in the afternoon sunlight.

Throwing himself flat on the brown hilltop, Ballard trained his glass first on the inner valley reaches of a bridle-path leading over the southern hogback. There was no living thing in sight in that field, though sufficient time had elapsed to

enable the Mexican to ride across the bridge and over the hills, if he had left the camp mounted.

The engineer frowned and slipped easily into the out-of-door man's habit of thinking aloud.

"It was a bare chance, of course. If he had news to carry to his master, he would save time by walking one mile as against riding four. Hello!"

The exclamation emphasised a small discovery. From the hilltop the entrance to the colonel's mysterious mine was in plain view, and for the first time in Ballard's observings of it the massive, iron-bound door was open. Bringing the glass to bear on the tunnel-mouth square of shadow, Ballard made out the figures of two men standing just within the entrance and far enough withdrawn to be hidden from prying eyes on the camp plateau. With the help of the glass, the young engineer could distinguish the shape of a huge white sombrero, and under the sombrero the red spark of a cigarette. Wherefore he rolled quickly to a less exposed position and awaited developments.

The suspense was short. In a few minutes the Mexican foreman emerged from the gloom of the mine-mouth, and with a single swift backward glance for the industries at the canyon portal, walked rapidly up the path toward the inner valley. Ballard sat up and trained the field-glass

again. Why had Manuel gone out of his way to stop at the mine? The answer, or at least one possible answer, was under the foreman's arm, taking the shape of a short-barrelled rifle of the type carried by express messengers on Western railways.

Ballard screwed the glass into its smallest compass, dropped it into his pocket, and made his way down to the camp mesa. The gun meant nothing more than that the Mexican had not deemed it advisable to appear in the construction camp armed. But, on the other hand, Ballard was fully convinced that he was on his way to Colonel Craigmiles as the bearer of news.

It was an hour later when Otto, the colonel's chauffeur, kicked out the clutch of the buzzing runabout before the door of the office bungalow and announced that he had come to take the convalescent back to Castle 'Cadia. Bromley was still asleep; hence there had been no opportunity for a joint discussion of the latest development in the little war. But when Ballard was helping him into the mechanician's seat, and Otto had gone for a bucket of water to cool the hissing radiator, there was time for a hurried word or two.

"More trouble, Loudon—it turned up while you were asleep. Manuel was here, in the camp, while we were hammering it out with Wingfield.

It is measurably certain that he overheard all or part of the talk. What he knows, the colonel doubtless knows, too, by this time, and——"

"Oh, good Lord!" groaned Bromley. "It was bad enough as it stood, but this drags Wingfield into it, neck and heels! What will they do to him?"

Ballard knitted his brows. "As Manuel could very easily make it appear in his tale-bearing, anything that might happen to Wingfield would be a pretty clear case of self-defence for Colonel Craigmiles. Wingfield knows too much."

"A great deal too much. If I dared say ten words to Elsa——"

"No," Ballard objected; "she is the one person to be shielded and spared. It's up to us to get Wingfield away from Castle 'Cadia and out of the country—before anything does happen to him."

"If I were only half a man again!" Bromley lamented. "But I know just how it will be; I sha'n't have a shadow of chance at Wingfield this evening. As soon as I show up, Miss Cauffrey and the others will scold me for overstaying my leave, and chase me off to bed."

"That's so; and it's right," mused Ballard. "You've no business to be out of bed this minute; you're not fit to be facing a ten-mile drive in this jig-wagon. By Jove: that's our way out of it! You climb down and let me go in your place. I'll

tell them we let you overdo yourself; that you were too tired to stand the motor trip—which is the fact, if you'd only admit it. That will give me a chance at Wingfield; the chance you wouldn't have if you were to go. What do you say?"

"I've already said it," was the convalescent's reply; and he let Ballard help him out of the mechanic's seat and into the bungalow.

This is how it chanced that the chauffeur, coming back from Garou's kitchen barrel with the second bucket of water, found his fares changed and the chief engineer waiting to be his passenger over the ten miles of roundabout road. It was all one to the Berliner. He listened to Ballard's brief explanation with true German impassiveness, cranked the motor, pulled himself in behind the pilot-wheel, and sent the little car bounding down the mesa hill to the Boiling Water bridge what time the hoister whistles were blowing the six-o'clock quitting signal. The Kentuckian looked at his watch mechanically, as one will at some familiar reminder of the time. Seven o'clock was the Castle 'Cadia dinner hour: thirty minutes should suffice for the covering of the ten miles of country road, and with the fates propitious there would be an empty half-hour for the cajoling or compelling of Wingfield, imperilled in his character of over-curious delver into other people's affairs.

So ran the reasonable prefiguring; but plans and prefigurings based upon the performance of a gasolene motor call for a generous factor of safety. Five miles from a tool-box in either direction, the engines of the runabout set up an ominous knocking. A stop was made, and Ballard filled and lighted his pipe while the chauffeur opened the bonnet and tapped and pried and screwed and adjusted. Ten minutes were lost in the testing and trying, and then the German named the trouble, with an emphatic "*Himmel!*" for a foreword. A broken bolt-head had dropped into the crank-case, and it would be necessary to take the engines to pieces to get it out.

Ballard consulted his watch again. It lacked only a quarter of an hour of the Castle 'Cadia dinner-time; and a five-mile tramp over the hills would consume at least an hour. Whatever danger might be threatening the playwright (and the farther Ballard got away from the revelations of the early afternoon, the more the entire fabric of accusation threatened to crumble into the stuff nightmares are made of), a delay of an hour or two could hardly bring it to a crisis. Hence, when Otto lighted the lamps and got out his wrenches, his passenger stayed with him and became a very efficient mechanic's helper.

This, as we have seen, was at a quarter before

seven. At a quarter before nine the broken bolt was replaced, the last nut was screwed home, and the engines of the runabout were once more in commission.

"A handy bit of road repairing, Otto," was Ballard's comment. "And we did it five miles from a lemon. How long will it take us to get in?"

The Berliner did not know. With no further bad luck, fifteen or twenty minutes should be enough. And in fifteen minutes or less the little car was racing up the maple-shaded avenue to the Castle 'Cadia carriage entrance.

Ballard felt trouble in the air before he descended from the car. The great portico was deserted, the piano was silent, and the lights were on in the upper rooms of the house. At the mounting of the steps, the Forestry man met him and drew him aside into the library, which was as empty as the portico.

"I heard the car and thought it would be Mr. Bromley," Bigelow explained; adding: "I'm glad he didn't come. There has been an accident."

"To—to Wingfield?"

"Yes. How did you know? It was just after dinner. The colonel had some experimental mixture cooking in his electric furnace, and he invited us all down to the laboratory to see the result. Wingfield tangled himself in the wires in some

unaccountable way and got a terrible shock. For a few minutes we all thought he was killed, but the colonel would not give up, and now he is slowly recovering."

Ballard sat down in the nearest chair and held his head in his hands. His mind was in the condition of a coffer-dam that has been laboriously pumped out, only to be overwhelmed by a sudden and irresistible return of the flood. The theory of premeditated assassination was no nightmare; it was a pitiless, brutal, inhuman fact. Wingfield, an invited guest, and with a guest's privileges and immunities, had been tried, convicted, and sentenced for knowing too much.

"It's pretty bad, isn't it?" he said to Bigelow, feeling the necessity of saying something, and realising at the same instant the futility of putting the horror of it into words for one who knew nothing of the true state of affairs.

"Bad enough, certainly. You can imagine how it harrowed all of us, and especially the women. Cousin Janet fainted and had to be carried up to the house; and Miss Elsa was the only one of the young women who wasn't perfectly helpless. Colonel Craigmiles was our stand-by; he knew just what to do, and how to do it. He is a wonderful man, Mr. Ballard."

"He is—in more ways than a casual observer

would suspect." Ballard suffered so much of his thought to set itself in words. To minimise the temptation to say more he turned his back upon the accident and accounted for himself and his presence at Castle 'Cadia.

"Bromley was pretty well tired out when Otto came down with the car, and I offered to ride around and make his excuses. We broke an engine bolt on the road: otherwise I should have been here two hours earlier. You say Wingfield is recovering? I wonder if I could see him for a few minutes, before I go back to camp?"

Bigelow offered to go up-stairs and find out; and Ballard waited in the silence of the deserted library for what seemed like a long time. And when the waiting came to an end it was not Bigelow who parted the portières and came silently to stand before his chair; it was the king's daughter.

"You have heard?" she asked, and her voice seemed to come from some immeasurable depth of anguish.

"Yes. Is he better?"

"Much better; though he is terribly weak and shaken." Then suddenly: "What brought you here—so late?"

He explained the ostensible object of his coming, and mentioned the cause of the delay. She heard

him through without comment, but there was doubt and keen distress and a great fear in the gray eyes when he was permitted to look into their troubled depths.

"If you are telling me the truth, you are not telling me all of it," she said, sinking wearily into one of the deepest of the easy-chairs and shading the tell-tale eyes with her hand.

"Why shouldn't I tell you all of it?" he rejoined evasively.

"I don't know your reasons: I can only fear them."

"If you could put the fear into words, perhaps I might be able to allay it," he returned gently.

"It is past alleviation; you know it. Mr. Wingfield was with you again to-day, and when he came home I knew that the thing I had been dreading had come to pass."

"How could you know it? Not from anything Wingfield said or did, I'm sure."

"No; but Jerry Blacklock was with him—and Jerry's face is an open book for any one who cares to read it. Won't you please tell me the worst, Breckenridge?"

"There isn't any worst," denied Ballard, lying promptly for love's sake. "We had luncheon together, the four of us, in honour of Bromley's recovery. Afterward, Wingfield spun yarns for us—

as he has a habit of doing when he can get an audience of more than one person. Some of his stories were more grewsome than common. I don't wonder that Jerry had a left-over thrill or two in his face."

She looked up from behind the eye-shading hand. "Do you dare to repeat those stories to me?"

His laugh lacked something of spontaneity.

"It is hardly a question of daring; it is rather a matter of memory—or the lack of it. Who ever tries to make a record of after-dinner fictions? Wingfield's story was a tale of impossible crimes and their more impossible detection; the plot and outline for a new play, I fancied, which he was trying first on the dog. Blacklock was the only one of his three listeners who took him seriously."

She was silenced, if not wholly convinced; and when she spoke again it was of the convalescent assistant.

"You are not going to keep Mr. Bromley at the camp, are you? He isn't able to work yet."

"Oh, no. You may send for him in the morning, if you wish. I—he was a little tired tonight, and I thought——"

"Yes; you have told me what you thought," she reminded him, half absently. And then, with a note of constraint in her voice that was quite new

to him: "You are not obliged to go back to Elbow Canyon to-night, are you? Your room is always ready for you at Castle 'Cadia."

"Thank you; but I'll have to go back. If I don't, Bromley will think he's the whole thing and start in to run the camp in the morning before I could show up."

She rose when he did, but her face was averted and he could not see her eyes when he went on in a tone from which every emotion save that of mere friendly solicitude was carefully effaced: "May I go up and jolly Wingfield a bit? He'll think it odd if I go without looking in at him."

"If you should go without doing that for which you came," she corrected, with the same impersonal note in her voice. "Of course, you may see him: come with me."

She led the way up the grand stair and left him at the door of a room in the wing which commanded a view of the sky-pitched backgrounding mountains. The door was ajar, and when he knocked and pushed it open he saw that the playwright was in bed, and that he was alone.

"By Jove, now!" said a weak voice from the pillows; "this is neighbourly of you, Ballard. How the dickens did you manage to hear of it?"

"Bad news travels fast," said Ballard, drawing a chair to the bedside. He did not mean to go

into details if he could help it; and to get away from them he asked how the miracle of recovery was progressing.

"Oh, I'm all right now," was the cheerful response—"coming alive at the rate of two nerves to the minute. And I wouldn't have missed it for the newest thousand-dollar bill that ever crackled in the palm of poverty. What few thrills I can't put into a description of electrocution, after this, won't be worth mentioning."

"They have left you alone?" queried Ballard, with a glance around the great room.

"Just this moment. The colonel and Miss Cauffrey and Miss Dosia were with me when the buzzer went off. Whoever sent you up pressed the button down stairs. Neat, isn't it. How's Bromley? I hope you didn't come to tell us that his first day in camp knocked him out."

"No; Bromley is all right. You are the sick man, now."

Wingfield's white teeth gleamed in a rather haggard smile.

"I have looked over the edge, Ballard; that's the fact."

"Tell me about it—if you can."

"There isn't much to tell. We were all crowding around the electric furnace, taking turns at the coloured-glass protected peep-hole. The colonel

had warned us about the wires, but the warning didn't cut any figure in my case."

"You stumbled?"

The man in bed flung a swift glance across the room toward the corridor door which Ballard had left ajar.

"Go quietly and shut that door," was his whispered command; and when Ballard had obeyed it: "Now pull your chair closer and I'll answer your question: No, I didn't stumble. Somebody tripped me, and in falling I grabbed at one of the electrodes."

"I was sure of it," said Ballard, quietly. "I knew that in all human probability you would be the next victim. That is why I persuaded Bromley to let me take his place in the motor-car. If the car hadn't broken down, I should have been here in time to warn you. I suppose it isn't necessary to ask who tripped you?"

The playwright rocked his head on the pillow.

"I'm afraid not, Ballard. The man who afterward saved my life—so they all say—was the one who stood nearest to me at the moment. The 'why' is what is tormenting me. I'm not the Arcadia Company, or its chief engineer, or anybody in particular in this game of 'heads I win, and tails you lose.'"

Ballard left his chair and walked slowly to the

mountain-viewing window. When he returned to the bedside, he said: "I can help you to the 'why.' What you said in my office to-day to three of us was overheard by a fourth—and the fourth was Manuel. An hour or so later he came up this way, on foot. Does that clear the horizon for you?"

"Perfectly," was the whispered response, followed by a silence heavy with forecastings.

"Under the changed conditions, it was only fair to you to bring you your warning, and to take off the embargo on your leaving Castle 'Cadia. Of course, you'll get yourself recalled to New York at once?" said Ballard.

Wingfield raised himself on one elbow, and again his lips parted in the grinning smile.

"Not in a thousand years, Ballard. I'll see this thing out now, if I get killed regularly once a day. You say I mustn't write about it, and that's so. I'm not a cad. But the experience is worth millions to me—worth all the chances I'm taking, and more. I'll stay."

Ballard gripped the womanish hand lying on the coverlet. Here, after all, and under all the overlayings of pose and craftsman egotism, was a man with a man's heart and courage.

"You're a brave fool, Wingfield," he said, warmly; "and because you are brave and a man grown, you shall be one of us. We—Bromley and

I—bluffed you to-day for a woman's sake. If you could have got away from the excitement of the man-hunt for a single second, I know your first thought would have been for the woman whose lifted finger silences three of us. Because you seemed to forget this for the moment, I knocked you down with your own theory. Does that clear another of the horizons for you?"

"Immensely. And I deserved all you gave me. Until I'm killed off, you may comfort yourself with the thought that one of the gallant three is here, in the wings, as you might say, ready and willing to do what he can to keep the curtain from rising on any more tragedy."

"Thank you," said Ballard, heartily; "that will be a comfort." Then, with a parting hand-grip and an added word of caution to the man who knew too much, he left the room and the house, finding his way unattended to the great portico and to the path leading down to the river road.

The mile faring down the valley in the velvety blackness of the warm summer night was a meliorating ending to the day of revelations and alarms; and for the first time since Wingfield's clever unravelling of the tangled mesh of mystery, the Kentuckian was able to set the accusing facts in orderly array. Yet now, as before, the greatest of the mysteries refused to take its place in the

wellnigh completed circle of incriminating discoveries. That the King of Arcadia, Elsa's father and the genial host of the great house on the knoll, was a common murderer, lost to every humane and Christian prompting of the soul, was still as incredible as a myth of the Middle Ages.

"I'll wake up some time in the good old daylight of the every-day, commonplace world, I hope," was Ballard's summing-up, when he had traversed the reflective mile and had let himself into the office bungalow to find Bromley sleeping peacefully in his bunk. "But it's a little hard to wait—with the air full of Damocles-swords, and with the dear girl's heart gripped in a vise that I can't unscrew. That is what makes it bitterer than death: she knows, and it is killing her by inches—in spite of the bravest heart that ever loved and suffered. God help her: God help us all!"

XX

THE GEOLOGIST

IT was Miss Craigmiles herself who gave Ballard the exact date of Professor Gardiner's coming; driving down to the construction camp alone in the little motor-car for that avowed purpose.

A cloudburst in the main range had made the stage road from Alta Vista impassable for the moment, leaving the Arcadia Company's railroad —by some unexplained miracle of good fortune— unharmed. Hence, unless the expected guest could be brought over from Alta Vista on the material train, he would be indefinitely detained on the other side of the mountain. Miss Elsa came ostensibly to beg a favour.

"Of course, I'll send over for him," said Ballard, when the favour had been named. "Didn't I tell you he is going to be *my* guest?"

"But he isn't," she insisted, playfully. Bromley was out and at work, Wingfield had entirely recovered from the effects of his electric shock, and

there had been no untoward happenings for three peaceful weeks. Wherefore there was occasion for light-heartedness.

Ballard descended from the bungalow porch and arbitrarily stopped the buzzing engines of the runabout by cutting out the batteries. "This is the first time I've seen you for three weeks," he asserted—which was a lover's exaggeration. "Please come up and sit on the porch. There is any number of things I want to say."

"Where is Mr. Bromley?" she asked, making no move to leave the driving-seat.

"He is out on the ditch survey—luckily for me. Won't you please 'light and come in?—as we say back in the Blue-grass."

"You don't deserve it. You haven't been near us since Mr. Bromley went back to work. Why?"

"I have been exceedingly busy; we are coming down the home-stretch on our job here, as you know." The commonplace excuse was the only one available. He could not tell her that it was impossible for him to accept further hospitalities at Castle 'Cadia.

"Mr. Bromley hasn't been too busy," she suggested.

"Bromley owes all of you a very great debt of gratitude."

"And you do not, you would say. That is quite true. You owe us nothing but uncompromising antagonism—hatred, if you choose to carry it to that extreme."

"No," he returned gravely. "I can't think of you and of enmity at the same moment."

"If you could only know," she said, half absently, and the trouble shadow came quickly into the backgrounding depths of the beautiful eyes. "There is no real cause for enmity or hatred—absolutely none."

"I am thinking of you," he reminded her, reverting to the impossibility of associating that thought with the other.

"Thank you; I am glad you can make even that much of a concession. It is more than another would make." Then, with the unexpectedness which was all her own: "I am still curious to know what you did to Mr. Wingfield: that day when he so nearly lost his life in the laboratory?"

"At what time in that day?" he asked, meaning to dodge if he could.

"You know—when you had him here in your office, with Jerry and Mr. Bromley."

"I don't remember all the things I did to him, that day and before it. I believe I made him welcome—when I had to. He hasn't been using his welcome much lately, though."

"No; not since that day that came near ending so terribly. I'd like to know what happened."

"Nothing—of any consequence. I believe I told you that Wingfield was boring us with the plot of a new play."

"Yes; and you said you couldn't remember it."

"I don't want to remember it. Let's talk of something else. Is your anxiety—the trouble you refuse to share with me—any lighter?"

"No—yes; just for the moment, perhaps."

"Are you still determined not to let me efface it for you?"

"You couldn't; no one can. It can never be effaced."

His smile was the man's smile of superior wisdom.

"Don't we always say that when the trouble is personal?"

She ignored the query completely, and her rejoinder was totally irrelevant—or it seemed to be.

"You think I came down here to ask you to send over to Alta Vista for Professor Gardiner. That was merely an excuse. I wanted to beg you once again to suspend judgment—not to be vindictive."

Again he dissimulated. "I'm not vindictive: why should I be?"

"You have every reason; or, at least, you be-

lieve you have." She leaned over the arm of the driving-seat and searched his eyes pleadingly: "Please tell me: how much did Mr. Wingfield find out?"

It was blankly impossible to tell her the hideous truth, or anything remotely approaching it. But his parrying of her question was passing skilless.

"Not being a mind-reader, I can't say what Wingfield knows—or thinks he knows. Our disagreement turned upon his threat to make literary material out of—well, out of matters that were in a good measure my own private and personal affairs."

"Oh; so there *was* a quarrel? That is more than you were willing to admit a moment ago."

"You dignify it too much. I believe I called him an ass, and he called me an idiot. There was no bloodshed."

"You are jesting again. You always jest when I want to be serious."

"I might retort that I learned the trick of it from you—in the blessed days that are now a part of another existence."

"Oh!" she said; and there was so much more of distress than of impatience in the little outcry that he was mollified at once.

"I'm going to crank the engines and send you home," he asseverated. "I'm not fit to talk to

you to-day." And he started the engines of the motor-car.

She put a dainty foot on the clutch-pedal. "You'll come up and see me?" she asked; adding: "Some time when you are fit?"

"I'll come when I am needed; yes."

He walked beside the slowly moving car as she sent it creeping down the mesa hill on the brakes. At the hill-bottom turn, where the camp street ended and the roundabout road led off to the temporary bridge, she stopped the car. The towering wall of the great dam, with its dotting of workmen silhouetted black against the blue of the Colorado sky, rose high on the left. She let her gaze climb to the summit of the huge dike.

"You are nearly through?" she asked.

"Yes. Two other weeks, with no bad luck, will see us ready to turn on the water."

She was looking straight ahead again.

"You know what that means to us at Castle 'Cadia?—but of course you do."

"I know I'd rather be a 'mucker' with a pick and shovel out yonder in the ditch than to be the boss here when the spillway gates are closed at the head of the cut-off tunnel. And that is the pure truth."

"This time I believe you without reservation, Breckenridge—my friend." Then: "Will Mr.

Pelham come out to the formal and triumphal opening of the Arcadian Irrigation District?"

"Oh, you can count on that—with all the trimmings. There is to be a demonstration in force, as Major Blacklock would say; special trains from Denver to bring the crowd, a barbecue dinner, speeches, a land-viewing excursion over the completed portion of the railroad, and fireworks in the evening while the band plays 'America.' You can trust Mr. Pelham to beat the big drum and to clash the cymbals vigorously and man-fashion at the psychological instant."

"For purely commercial reasons, of course? I could go a step further and tell you something else that will happen. There will be a good many transfers of the Arcadia Company's stock at the triumphal climax."

He was standing with one foot on the car step and his hands buried in the pockets of his short working-coat. His eyes narrowed to regard her thoughtfully.

"What do you know about such things?" he demurred. "You know altogether too much for one small bachelor maid. It's uncanny."

"I am the cow-punching princess of Arcadia, and Mr. Pelham's natural enemy, you must remember," she countered, with a laugh that sounded entirely care-free. "I could tell you more about

the stock affair. Mr. Pelham has been very liberal with his friends in the floating of this great and glorious undertaking—to borrow one of his pet phrases. He has placed considerable quantities of the Arcadia Company's stock among them at merely nominal prices, asking only that they sign a 'gentlemen's agreement' not to resell any of it, so that my father could get it. But there is a wheel within that wheel, too. Something more than half of the nominal capitalisation has been reserved as 'treasury stock.' When the enthusiasm reaches the proper height, this reserved stock will be put upon the market. People will be eager to buy it—won't they?—with the work all done, and everything in readiness to tap the stream of sudden wealth?"

"Probably: that would be the natural inference."

"I thought so. And, as the company's chief engineer, you could doubtless get in on the 'ground floor' that Mr. Pelham is always talking about, couldn't you?"

The question was one to prick an honest man in his tenderest part. Ballard was hurt, and his face advertised it.

"See here, little girl," he said, flinging the formalities to the winds; "I am the company's hired man at the present moment, but that is entirely

without prejudice to my convictions, or to the fact that some day I am going to marry you. I hope that defines my attitude. As matters stand, Mr. Pelham couldn't hand me out any of his stock on a silver platter!"

"And Mr. Bromley?"

"You needn't fear for Loudon; he isn't going to invest, either. You know very well that he is in precisely the same boat that I am."

"How shocking!" she exclaimed, with an embarrassed little laugh. "Is Mr. Bromley to marry your widow? Or are you to figure as the consolation prize for his widow? Doubtless you have arranged it amicably between you."

Having said the incendiary thing, he brazened it out like a man and a lover.

"It's no joke. I suppose I might sidestep, but I sha'n't. You know very well that Bromley is in love with you—up to his chin, and I'm afraid you have been too kind to him. That is a little hard on Loudon, you know—when you are going to marry some one else. But let that rest, and tell me a little more about this stock deal. Why should there be a 'gentlemen's agreement' to exclude your father? To a rank outsider like myself, Arcadia Irrigation would seem to be about the last thing in the world Colonel Adam Craigmiles would want to buy."

"Under present conditions, I think it is," she said. "*I* shouldn't buy it now."

"What would you do, O wise virgin of the market-place?"

"I'd wait patiently while the rocket is going up; I might even clap my hands and say 'Ah-h-h!' with the admiring multitude. But afterward, when the stick comes down, I'd buy every bit of Arcadia Irrigation I could find."

Again he was regarding her through half-closed eyelids.

"As I said before, you know too much about such things—altogether too much." He said it half in raillery, but his deduction was made seriously enough. "You think your father will win his law-suit and so break the market?"

"No; on the contrary, I'm quite sure he will be beaten. I am going, now. Don't ask me any more questions: I've said too much to the company's engineer, as it is."

"You have said nothing to the company's engineer," he denied. "You have been talking to Breckenridge Ballard, your future——"

She set the car in motion before he could complete the sentence, and he stood looking after it as it shot away up the hills. It was quite out of sight, and the sound of its drumming motor was lost in the hoarse grumbling of the river, before he began

to realise that Elsa's visit had not been for the purpose of asking him to send for Gardiner, nor yet to beg him not to be vindictive. Her real object had been to warn him not to buy Arcadia Irrigation. "Why?" came the unfailing question, shotlike; and, like all the others of its tribe, it had to go unanswered.

It was two days later when Gardiner, the assistant professor of geology, kept his appointment, was duly met at Alta Vista by Ballard's special engine and a "dinkey" way-car, and was transported in state to the Arcadian fastnesses. Ballard had it in mind to run down the line on the other engine to meet the Bostonian; but Elsa forestalled him by intercepting the "special" at Ackerman's with the motor-car and whisking the guest over the roundabout road to Castle 'Cadia.

Gardiner walked down to the construction camp at Elbow Canyon bright and early the following morning to make his peace with Ballard.

"Age has its privileges which youth is obliged to concede, Breckenridge, my son," was the form his apology took. "When I learned that I might have my visit with you, and still be put up at the millionaire hostelry in the valley above, I didn't hesitate a moment. I am far beyond the point of bursting into enthusiastic raptures over a bunk shake-down in a camp shanty, steel forks, tin

platters, and plum-duff, when I can live on the fat of the land and sleep on a modern mattress. How are you coming on? Am I still in time to be in at the death?"

"I hope there isn't going to be any death," was the laughing rejoinder. "Because, in the natural sequence of things, it would have to be mine, you know."

"Ah! You are tarred a little with the superstitious stick, yourself, are you? What was it you said to me about 'two sheer accidents and a commonplace tragedy'? You may remember that I warned you, and the event proves that I was a true prophet. I predicted that Arcadia would have its shepherdess, you recollect."

Thus, with dry humour, the wise man from the East. But Ballard was not prepared at the moment for a plunge into the pool of sentiment with the mildly cynical old schoolman for a bath-master, and he proposed, as the readiest alternative, a walking tour of the industries.

Gardiner was duly impressed by the industrial miracles, and by the magnitude of the irrigation scheme. Also, he found fitting words in which to express his appreciation of the thoroughness of Ballard's work, and of the admirable system under which it was pressing swiftly to its conclusion. But these matters became quickly subsidiary when

he began to examine the curious geological formation of the foothill range through which the river elbowed its tumultuous course.

"These little wrinklings of the earth's crust at the foot of the great mountain systems are nature's puzzle-pieces for us," he remarked. "I foresee an extremely enjoyable vacation for me—if you have forgiven me to the extent of a snack at your mess-table now and then, and a possible night's lodging in your bungalow if I should get caught out too late to reach the millionaire luxuries of Castle 'Cadia."

"If I haven't forgiven you, Bromley will take you in," laughed Ballard. "Make yourself one of us—when you please and as you please. The camp and everything in it belongs to you for as long as you can persuade yourself to stay."

Gardiner accepted the invitation in its largest sense, and the afternoon of the same day found him prowling studiously in the outlet canyon with hammer and specimen-bag; a curious figure of complete abstraction in brown duck and service leggings, overshadowed by an enormous cork-lined helmet-hat that had been faded and stained by the sun and rains of three continents. Ballard passed the word among his workmen. The absent-minded stranger under the cork hat was the guest of the camp, who was to be permitted to go

and come as he chose, whose questions were to be answered without reserve, and whose peculiarities, if he had any, were to pass unremarked.

With the completion of the dam so near at hand, neither of the two young men who were responsible for the great undertaking had much time to spare for extraneous things. But Gardiner asked little of his secondary hosts; and presently the thin, angular figure prowling and tapping at the rocks became a familiar sight in the busy construction camp. It was Lamoine, the camp jester, who started the story that the figure in brown canvas was a mascot, imported specially by the "boss" to hold the "hoodoo" in check until the work should be done; and thereafter the Boston professor might have chipped his specimens from the facing stones on the dam without let or hindrance.

The masons were setting the coping course on the great wall on a day when Gardiner's studious enthusiasm carried him beyond the dinner-hour at Castle 'Cadia and made him an evening guest in the engineer's adobe; and in the after-supper talk it transpired that the assistant in geology had merely snatched a meagre fortnight out of his work in the summer school, and would be leaving for home in another day or two.

Both of the young men protested their disappointment. They had been too busy to see any-

thing of their guest in a comradely way, and they had been looking forward to the lull in the activities which would follow the opening celebration and promising themselves a more hospitable entertainment of the man who had been both Mentor and elder brother to them in the Boston years.

"You are not regretting it half as keenly as I am," the guest assured them. "Apart from losing the chance to thresh it out with you two, I have never been on more fascinatingly interesting geological ground. I could spend an entire summer among these wonderful hills of yours without exhausting their astonishing resources."

Ballard made allowances for scholastic enthusiasm. He had slighted geology for the more strictly practical studies in his college course.

"Meaning the broken formations?" he asked.

"Meaning the general topsyturvyism of all the formations. Where you might reasonably expect to find one stratum, you find others perhaps thousands of years older—or younger—in the geological chronology. I wonder you haven't galvanised a little enthusiasm over it: you discredit your alma mater and me when you regard these marvellous hills merely as convenient buttresses for your wall of masonry. And, by the way, that reminds me: neither of you two youngsters is responsible for the foundations of that dam; isn't that the fact?"

"It is," said Bromley, answering for both. Then he added that the specifications called for bed-rock, which Fitzpatrick, who had worked under Braithwaite, said had been uncovered and properly benched for the structure.

"'Bed-rock,'" said the geologist, reflectively. "That is a workman's term, and is apt to be misleading. The vital question, under such abnormal conditions as those presenting themselves in your canyon, is, What kind of rock was it?"

Bromley shook his head. "You can't prove it by me. The foundations were all in before I came on the job. But from Fitzpatrick's description I should take it to be the close-grained limestone."

"H'm," said Gardiner. "Dam-building isn't precisely in my line; but I shouldn't care to trust anything short of the granites in such a locality as this."

"You've seen something?" queried Ballard.

"Nothing immediately alarming; merely an indication of what might be. Where the river emerges from your cut-off tunnel below the dam, it has worn out a deep pit in the old bed, as you know. The bottom of this pit must, in the nature of things, be far below the foundations of the masonry. Had you thought of that?"

"I have—more than once or twice," Ballard admitted.

"Very well," continued the Master of the Rocks; "that circumstance suggests three interrogation points. Query one: How has the diverted torrent managed to dig such a deep cavity if the true primitives—your workman's 'bed-rock'—underlie its channel cutting? Query two: What causes the curious reverberatory sound like distant thunder made by the stream as it plunges into this pit—a sound suggesting subterranean caverns? Query three—and this may be set down as the most important of the trio: Why is the detritus washed up out of this singular pot-hole a friable brown shale, quite unlike anything found higher up in the bed of the stream?"

The two young men exchanged swift glances of apprehension. "Your deductions, Professor?" asked Bromley, anxiously.

"Now you are going too fast. True science doesn't deduce: it waits until it can prove. But I might hazard a purely speculative guess. Mr. Braithwaite's foundation stratum—your contractor's 'bed-rock'—may not be the true primitive; it may in its turn be underbedded by this brown shale that the stream is washing up out of its pot-hole."

"Which brings on more talk," said Ballard, grappling thoughtfully with the new perplexities forming themselves upon Gardiner's guess.

"Decidedly, one would say. Granting my speculative answer to Query Number Three, the Arcadia Company's dam may stand for a thousand years—or it may not. Its life may possibly be determined in a single night, if by any means the water impounded above it should find its way through Fitzpatrick's 'bed-rock' to an underlying softer stratum."

Ballard's eyes were fixed upon a blue-print profile of Elbow Canyon pinned upon the wall, when he said: "If that pot-hole, or some rift similar to it, were above the dam instead of below it, for example?"

"Precisely," said the geologist. "In five minutes after the opening of such an underground channel your dam might be transformed into a makeshift bridge spanning an erosive torrent comparable in fierce and destructive energy, to nothing milder than a suddenly released Niagara."

Silence ensued, and afterward the talk drifted to other fields; was chiefly reminiscent of the younger men's university years. It was while Bromley and Gardiner were carrying the brunt of it that Ballard got up and went out. A few minutes later the out-door stillness of the night was shattered by the sharp crack of a rifle, and other shots followed in quick succession.

Bromley sprang afoot at the first discharge, but

before he could reach the door of the adobe, Ballard came in, carrying a hatful of roughly crumbled brown earth. He was a little short of breath, and his eyes were flashing with excitement. Nevertheless, he was cool enough to stop Bromley's question before it could be set in words.

"It was only one of the colonel's Mexican mine guards trying a little rifle practice in the dark," he explained; and before there could be any comment: "I went out to get this, Gardiner"—indicating the hatful of earth. "It's a sample of some stuff I'd like to have you take back to Boston with you for a scientific analysis. I've got just enough of the prospector's blood in me to make me curious about it."

The geologist examined the brown earth critically; passed a handful of it through his fingers; smelled it; tasted it.

"How much have you got of this?" he asked, with interest palpably aroused.

"Enough," rejoined the Kentuckian, evasively.

"Then your fortune is made, my son. This 'stuff,' as you call it, is the basis of Colonel Craigmiles's millions. I hope your vein isn't a part of his."

Again Ballard evaded the implied question. "What do you know about it, Gardiner? Have you ever seen any of it before?"

"I have, indeed. More than that, I have 'proved up' on it, as your Western miners say of their claims. A few evenings ago we were talking of expert analyses—the colonel and young Wingfield and I—up at the house of luxuries, and the colonel ventured to wager that he could stump me; said he could give me a sample of basic material carrying fabulous values, the very name of which I wouldn't be able to tell him after the most exhaustive laboratory tests. Of course, I had to take him up—if only for the honour of the Institute—and the three of us went down to his laboratory. The sample he gave me was some of this brown earth."

"And you analysed it?" inquired Ballard with eagerness unconcealed.

"I did; and won a box of the colonel's high-priced cigars, for which, unhappily, I have no possible use. The sample submitted, like this in your hat, was zirconia; the earth-ore which carries the rare metal zirconium. Don't shame me and your alma mater by saying that this means nothing to you."

"You've got us down," laughed Bromley. "It's only a name to me; the name of one of the theoretical metals cooked up in laboratory experiments. And I venture to say it is even less than that to Breckenridge."

"It is a very rare metal, and up to within a few years has never been found in a natural state or produced in commercial quantities," explained the analyst, mounting and riding his hobby with apparent zest. "A refined product of zirconia, the earth itself, has been used to make incandescent gas-mantles; and it was M. Léoffroy, of Paris, who discovered a method of electric-furnace reduction for isolating the metal. It was a great discovery. Zirconium, which is exceedingly dense and practically irreducible by wear, is supplanting iridium for the pointing of gold pens, and its value for that purpose is far in excess of any other known substance."

"But Colonel Craigmiles never ships anything from his mine, so far as any one can see," Ballard cut in.

"No? It isn't necessary. He showed us his reduction-plant—run by water-power from the little dam in the upper canyon. It is quite perfect. You will understand that the actual quantity of zirconium obtained is almost microscopic; but since it is worth much more than diamonds, weight for weight, the plant needn't be very extensive. And the fortunate miner in this instance is wholly independent of the transportation lines. He can carry his output to market in his vest pocket."

After this, the talk, resolutely shunted by Bal-

lard, veered aside from Arcadian matters. Later on, when Bromley was making up a shake-down bed in the rear room for the guest, the Kentuckian went out on the porch to smoke. It was here that Bromley found him after the Bostonian had been put to bed.

"Now, then, I want to know where you got that sample, Breckenridge?" he demanded, without preface.

Ballard's laugh was quite cheerful.

"I stole it out of one of the colonel's ore bins at the entrance of the mine over yonder."

"I thought so. And the shots?"

"They were fired at me by one of the Mexican night guards, of course. One of them hit the hat as I was running away, and I was scared stiff for fear Gardiner's sharp old eyes would discover the hole. I'm right glad for one thing, Loudon; and that is that the mine is really a mine. Sometimes I've been tempted to suspect that it was merely a hole in the ground, designed and maintained purely for the purpose of cinching the Arcadia Company for damages."

Bromley sat up straight and his teeth came together with a little click. He was remembering the professor's talk about the underlying shales, and a possible breach into them above the dam when he said: "Or to—" but the sentence was

left unfinished. Instead, he fell to reproaching Ballard for his foolhardiness.

"Confound you, Breckenridge! you haven't sense enough to stay in the house when it's raining out-of-doors! The idea of your taking such reckless chances on a mere whiff of curiosity! Let me have a pipeful of that tobacco—unless you mean to hog that, too—along with all the other risky things."

XXI

MR. PELHAM'S GAME-BAG

THE *fête champêtre*, as President Pelham named it in the trumpet-flourish of announcement, to celebrate the laying of the final stone of the great dam at the outlet of Elbow Canyon, anticipated the working completion of the irrigation system by some weeks. That the canals were not yet in readiness to furnish water to the prospective farmer really made little difference. The spectacular event was the laying of the top-stone; and in the promoter's plans a well-arranged stage-effect was of far greater value than any actual parcelling out of the land to intended settlers.

Accordingly, no effort was spared to make the celebration an enthusiastic success. For days before the auspicious one on which the guest trains began to arrive from Alta Vista and beyond, the camp force spent itself in setting the scene for the triumph. The spillway gate, designed to close the cut-off tunnel and so to begin the impounding of the river, was put in place ready to be forced down

by its machinery; the camp mesa was scraped and raked and cleared of the industrial litter; a platform was erected for the orators and the brass band; a towering flagstaff—this by the express direction of the president—was planted in the middle of the mesa parade ground; and with the exception of camp cook Garou, busy with a small army of assistants over the barbecue pits, the construction force was distributed among the camps on the canals—this last a final touch of Mr. Pelham's to secure the degree of exclusiveness for the celebration which might not have been attainable in the presence of an outnumbering throng of workmen.

In the celebration proper the two engineers had an insignificant part. When the trains were in and side-tracked, and the working preliminaries were out of the way, the triumphal programme, as it had been outlined in a five-page letter from the president to Ballard, became automatic, moving smoothly from number to number as a well-designed masterpiece of the spectacular variety should. There were no hitches, no long waits for the audience. Mr. Pelham, carrying his two-hundred-odd pounds of avoirdupois as jauntily as the youngest promoter of them all, was at once the genial host, the skilful organiser, prompter, stage-manager, chorus-leader; playing his many

parts letter-perfect, and never missing a chance to gain a few more notches on the winding-winch of enthusiasm.

While the band and the orators were alternating, Ballard and Bromley, off duty for the time, lounged on the bungalow porch awaiting their cue. There had been no awkward happenings thus far. The trains had arrived on time; the carefully staged spectacle was running like a well-oiled piece of mechanism; the August day, despite a threatening mass of storm cloud gathering on the distant slopes of the background mountain range, was perfect; and, thanks to Mr. Pelham's gift of leadership, the celebrators had been judiciously wrought up to the pitch at which everything was applauded and nothing criticised. Hence, there was no apparent reason for Ballard's settled gloom; or for Bromley's impatience manifesting itself in sarcastic flings at the company's secretary, an ex-politician of the golden-tongued tribe, who was the oratorical spellbinder of the moment.

"For Heaven's sake! will he never saw it off and let us get that stone set?" gritted the assistant, when the crowd cheered, and the mellifluous flood, checked for the applausive instant, poured steadily on. "Why in the name of common sense did Mr. Pelham want to spring this batch of human phonographs on us!"

"The realities will hit us soon enough," growled Ballard, whose impatience took the morose form. Then, with a sudden righting of his tilted camp-stool: "Good Lord, Loudon! Look yonder—up the canyon!"

The porch outlook commanded a view of the foothill canyon, and of a limited area of the bowl-shaped upper valley. At the canyon head, and on the opposite side of the river, three double-seated buckboards were wheeling to disembark their passengers; and presently the Castle 'Cadia house-party, led by Colonel Craigmiles himself, climbed the left-hand path to the little level space fronting the mysterious mine.

"By Jove!" gasped Bromley; "I nearly had a fit—I thought they were coming over here. Now what in the name of——"

"It's all right," cut in Ballard, irritably. "Why shouldn't the colonel want to be present at his own funeral? And you needn't be afraid of their coming over here. The colonel wouldn't wipe his feet on that mob of money-hunters around the band-stand. See; they are making a private box of the mine entrance."

The remark framed itself upon the fact. At the colonel's signal the iron-bound tunnel door had swung open, and Wingfield and Blacklock, junior, with the help of the buckboard drivers, were

piling timbers on the little plateau for the party's seating.

It was Colonel Craigmiles's own proposal, this descent upon the commercial festivities at the dam; and Elsa had yielded only after exhausting her ingenuity in trying to defeat it. She had known in advance that it could not be defeated. For weeks her father's attitude had been explainable only upon a single hypothesis; one which she had alternately accepted and rejected a hundred times during the two years of dam-building; and this excursion was less singular than many other consequences of the mysterious attitude.

She was recalling the mysteries as she sat on the pile of timbers with Wingfield, hearing but not heeding the resounding periods of the orator across the narrow chasm. With the inundation of the upper valley an impending certainty, measurable by weeks and then by days, and now by hours, nothing of any consequence had been done at Castle 'Cadia by way of preparing for it. Coming down early one morning to cut flowers for the breakfast-table, she had found two men in mechanics' overclothes installing a small gasolene electric plant near the stables; this, she supposed, was for the house-lighting when the laboratory should be submerged. A few days later she had come upon Otto, the chauffeur, building a

light rowboat in a secluded nook in the upper canyon.

But beyond these apparently trivial precautions, nothing had been done, and her father had said no word to her or to the guests of what was to be done when the closed-in valley should become a lake with Castle 'Cadia for its single island. Meanwhile, the daily routine of the country house had gone on uninterruptedly; and once, when Mrs. Van Bryck had asked her host what would happen when the floods came, Elsa had heard her father laughingly assure his guest in the presence of the others that nothing would happen.

That Wingfield knew more than these surface indications could tell the keenest observer, Elsa was well convinced; how much more, she could only guess. But one thing was certain: ever since the day spent with Ballard and Bromley and Jerry Blacklock at the construction camp—the day of his narrow escape from death—the playwright had been a changed man; cynical, ill at ease, or profoundly abstracted by turns, and never less companionable than at the present moment while he sat beside her on the timber balk, scowling up and across at the band-stand, at the spellbound throng ringing it in, and at the spellbinding secretary shaming the pouring torrent in the ravine below with his flood of rhetoric.

"What sickening rot!" he scoffed in open disgust. And then: "It must be delightfully comforting to Ballard and Bromley to have that wild ass of the market-place braying over their work! Somebody ought to hit him."

But the orator was preparing to do a little of the hitting, himself. The appearance of the party at the mine entrance had not gone unremarked, and the company's secretary recognised the company's enemy at a glance. He was looking over the heads of the celebrators and down upon the group on the opposite side of the narrow chasm when he said:

"So, ladies and gentlemen, this great project, in the face of the most obstinate, and, I may say, lawless, opposition; in spite of violence and petty obstruction on the part of those who would rejoice, even to-day, in its failure; this great work has been carried on to its triumphant conclusion, and we are gathered here on this beautiful morning in the bright sunshine and under the shadow of these magnificent mountains to witness the final momentous act which shall add the finishing stone to this grand structure; a structure which shall endure and subserve its useful and fructifying purpose so long as these mighty mountains rear their snowy heads to look down in approving majesty upon a desert made fair and beautiful by the hand of man."

Hand-clappings, cheers, a stirring of the crowd, and the upstarting of the brass band climaxed the rhetorical peroration, and Elsa glanced anxiously over her shoulder. She knew her father's temper and the fierce quality of it when the provocation was great enough to arouse it; but he was sitting quietly between Dosia and Madge Cantrell, and the publicly administered affront seemed to have missed him.

When the blare of brass ceased, the mechanical part of the spectacle held the stage for a few brief minutes. The completing stone was carefully toggled in the grappling-hooks of the derrick-fall, and at Ballard's signal the hoisting engine coughed sharply, besprinkling the spectators liberally with a shower of cinders, the derrick-boom swung around, and the stone was lowered cautiously into its place.

With a final rasping of trowels, the workmen finished their task, and Ballard walked out upon the abutment and laid his hand on the wheel controlling the drop-gate which would cut off the escape of the river through the outlet tunnel. There was a moment of impressive silence, and Elsa held her breath. The day, the hour, the instant which her father had striven so desperately to avert had come. Would it pass without its tragedy?

She saw Ballard give the last searching glance at the gate mechanism; saw President Pelham step out to give the signal. Then there was a stir in the group behind her, and she became conscious that her father was on his feet; that his voice was dominating the droning roar of the torrent and the muttering of the thunder on the far-distant heights.

"Mistuh-uh Pelham—and you otheh gentlemen of the Arcadia Company—you have seen fit to affront me, suhs, in the most public manneh, befo' the members of my family and my guests. This was youh privilege, and you have used it acco'ding to youh gifts. Neve'theless, it shall not be said that I failed in my neighbo'ly duty at this crisis. Gentlemen, when you close that gate——"

The president turned impatiently and waved his hand to Ballard. The band struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner," a round ball of bunting shot to the top of the flagstaff over the band-stand and broke out in a broad flag, and Elsa saw the starting-wheel turning slowly under Ballard's hand. The clapping and cheering and the band clamour drowned all other sounds; and the colonel's daughter, rising to stand beside Wingfield, felt rather than heard the jarring shock of a near-by explosion punctuating the plunge of the great gate as it was driven down by the geared ower-screws.

What followed passed unnoticed by the wildly cheering spectators crowding the canyon brink to see the foaming, churning torrent recoil upon itself and beat fiercely upon the lowered gate and the steep-sloped wall of the dam's foundation courses. But Elsa saw Ballard start as from the touch of a hot iron; saw Bromley run out quickly to lay hold of him. Most terrible of all, she turned swiftly to see her father coming out of the mine entrance with a gun in his hands—saw and understood.

It was Wingfield, seeing all that she saw and understanding quite as clearly, who came to her rescue at a moment when the bright August sunshine was filling with dancing black motes for her.

"Be brave!" he whispered. "See—he isn't hurt much: he has let go of the wheel, and Bromley is only steadying him a bit." And then to the others, with his habitual air of bored cheerfulness: "The show is over, good people, and the water is rising to cut us off from luncheon. Sound the retreat, somebody, and let's mount and ride before we get wet feet."

A movement toward the waiting vehicles followed, and at the facing about Elsa observed that her father hastily flung the rifle into the mine tunnel-mouth; and had a fleeting glimpse of Bal-

lard and Bromley walking slowly arm-in-arm toward the mesa shore along the broad coping of the abutment.

At the buckboards Wingfield stood her friend again. "Send Jerry Blacklock down to see how serious it is," he suggested, coming between her and the others; and while she was doing it, he held the group for a final look down the canyon at the raging flood still churning and leaping at its barriers like some sentient wild thing trapped and maddened with the first fury of restraint.

Young Blacklock made a sprinter's record on his errand and was back almost immediately. Mr. Ballard had got his arm pinched in some way at the gate-head, he reported: it was nothing serious, and the Kentuckian sent word that he was sorry that the feeding of the multitude kept him from saying so to Miss Elsa in person. Elsa did not dare to look at Wingfield while Blacklock was delivering his message; and in the buckboard-seating for the return to Castle 'Cadia, she contrived to have Bigelow for her companion.

It was only a few minutes after Jerry Blacklock had raced away up the canyon path with his message of reassurance that Bromley, following Ballard into the office room of the adobe bungalow and locking the door, set to work deftly to dress and bandage a deep bullet-crease across the mus-

cles of his chief's arm; a wound painful enough, but not disabling.

"Well, what do you think now, Breckenridge?" he asked, in the midst of the small surgical service.

"I haven't any more thinks coming to me," was the sober reply. "And it is not specially comforting to have the old ones confirmed. You are sure it was the colonel who fired at me?"

"I saw the whole thing; all but the actual trigger-pulling, you might say. When Mr. Pelham cut him off, he turned and stepped back into the mouth of the mine. Then, while they were all standing up to see you lower the gate, I heard the shot and saw him come out with the gun in his hands. I was cool enough that far along to take in all the little details: the gun was a short-barrelled Winchester—the holster-rifle of the cow-punchers."

"*Ouch!*" said Ballard, wincing under the bandaging. Then: "The mysteries have returned, Loudon; we were on the wrong track—all of us. Wingfield and you and I had figured out that the colonel was merely playing a cold-blooded game for delay. That guess comes back to us like a fish-hook with the bait gone. There was nothing, less than nothing, to be gained by killing me today."

Bromley made the negative sign of assenting perplexity.

"It's miles too deep for me," he admitted. "Three nights ago, when I was dining at Castle 'Cadia, Colonel Craigmiles spoke of you as a father might speak of the man whom he would like to have for a son-in-law: talked about the good old gentlemanly Kentucky stock, and all that, you know. I can't begin to sort it out."

"I am going to sort it out, some day when I have time," declared Ballard; and the hurt being temporarily repaired, they went out to superintend the arrangements for feeding the visiting throng in the big mess-tent.

After the barbecue, and more speech-making around the trestle-tables in the mess-tent, the railroad trains were brought into requisition, and various tours of inspection through the park ate out the heart of the afternoon for the visitors. Bromley took charge of that part of the entertainment, leaving Ballard to nurse his sore arm and to watch the slow submersion of the dam as the rising flood crept in little lapping waves up the sloping back-wall.

The afternoon sun beat fiercely upon the deserted construction camp, and the heat, rarely oppressive in the mountain-girt altitudes, was stifling. Down in the cook camp, Garou and his helpers were washing dishes by the crate and preparing the evening luncheon to be served after the

trains returned; and the tinkling clatter of china was the only sound to replace the year-long clamour of the industries and the hoarse roar of the river through the cut-off.

Between his occasional strolls over to the dam and the canyon brink to mark the rising of the water, Ballard sat on the bungalow porch and smoked. From the time-killing point of view the great house in the upper valley loomed in mirage-like proportions in the heat haze; and by three o'clock the double line of aspens marking the river's course had disappeared in a broad band of molten silver half encircling the knoll upon which the mirage mansion swayed and shimmered.

Ballard wondered what the house-party was doing; what preparations, if any, had been made for its dispersal. For his own satisfaction he had carefully run bench-levels with his instruments from the dam height through the upper valley. When the water should reach the coping course, some three or four acres of the house-bearing knoll would form an island in the middle of the reservoir lake. The house would be completely cut off, the orchards submerged, and the nearest shore, that from which the roundabout road approached, would be fully a half-mile distant, with the water at least ten feet deep over the raised causeway of the road itself.

Surely the colonel would not subject his guests to the inconvenience of a stay at Castle 'Cadia when the house would be merely an isolated shelter upon an island in the middle of the great lake, Ballard concluded; and when the mirage effect cleared away to give him a better view, he got out the field-glass and looked for some signs of the inevitable retreat.

There were no signs, so far as he could determine. With the help of the glass he could pick out the details of the summer afternoon scene on the knoll-top; could see that there were a number of people occupying the hammocks and lazy-chairs under the tree-pillared portico; could make out two figures, which he took to be Bigelow and one of the Cantrell sisters, strolling back and forth in a lovers' walk under the shade of the maples.

It was all very perplexing. The sweet-toned little French clock on its shelf in the office room behind him had struck three, and there were only a few more hours of daylight left in Castle 'Cadia's last day as a habitable dwelling. And yet, if he could trust the evidence of his senses, the castle's garrison was making no move to escape: this though the members of it must all know that the rising of another sun would see their retreat cut off by the impounded flood.

After he had returned the field-glass to its case

on the wall of the office the ticking telegraph instrument on Bromley's table called him, signing "E—T," the end-of-track on the High Line Extension. It was Bromley, wiring in to give the time of the probable return of the excursion trains for Garou's supper serving.

"How are you getting on?" clicked Ballard, when the time had been given.

"Fine," was the answer. "Everything lovely, and the goose honks high. Enthusiasm to burn, and we're burning it. Just now the baa-lambs are surrounding Mr. Pelham on the canal embankment and singing 'For he's a jolly good fellow' at the tops of their voices. It's great, and we're all hypnotised. So long; and take care of that pinched arm."

After Bromley broke and the wire became dumb, the silence of the deserted camp grew more oppressive and the heat was like the breath of a furnace. Ballard smoked another pipe on the bungalow porch, and when the declining sun drove him from this final shelter he crossed the little mesa and descended the path to the ravine below the dam.

Here he found food for reflection, and a thing to be done. With the flow of the river cut off, the ground which had lately been its channel was laid bare; and recalling Gardiner's hint about the

possible insecurity of the dam's foundations, he began a careful examination of the newly turned leaf in the record of the great chasm.

What he read on the freshly-turned page of the uncovered stream-bed was more instructive than reassuring. The great pit described by Gardiner was still full of water, but it was no longer a foaming whirlpool, and the cavernous undercutting wrought by the diverted torrent was alarmingly apparent. In the cut-off tunnel the erosive effect of the stream-rush was even more striking. Dripping rifts and chasms led off in all directions, and the promontory which gave its name to the Elbow, and which formed the northern anchorage of the dam, had been mined and tunnelled by the water until it presented the appearance of a huge hollow tooth.

The extreme length of the underground passage was a scant five hundred feet; but what with the explorations of the side rifts—possible only after he had gone back to the bungalow for candles and rubber thigh-boots—the engineer was a good half-hour making his way up to the great stop-gate with the rising flood on its farther side. Here the burden of anxiety took on a few added pounds. There was more or less running water in the tunnel, and he had been hoping to find the leak around the fittings of the gate. But the gate was practically tight.

"That settles it," he mused gloomily. "It is seeping through this ghastly honeycomb somewhere, and it's up to us to get busy with the concrete mixers—and to do it quickly. I can't imagine what Braithwaite was thinking of; to drive this tunnel through one of nature's compost heaps, and then to turn a stream of water through it."

The sun was a fiery globe swinging down to the sky-pitched western horizon when the Kentuckian picked his way out of the dripping caverns. There were two added lines in the frown wrinkling between his eyes, and he was still talking to himself in terms of discouragement. At a conservative estimate three months of time and many thousands of dollars must be spent in lining the spillway tunnel with a steel tube, and in plugging the caverns of the hollow tooth with concrete. And in any one of the ninety days the water might find its increasing way through the "compost heap"; whereupon the devastating end would come swiftly.

It was disheartening from every point of view. Ballard knew nothing of the financial condition of the Arcadia Company, but he guessed shrewdly that Mr. Pelham would be reluctant to put money into work that could not be seen and celebrated with the beating of drums. None the less, for the safety of every future land buyer with holdings

below the great dam, the work must be done. Otherwise——

The chief engineer's clean-cut face was still wearing the harassed scowl when Bromley, returning with the excursionists, saw it again.

"The grouch is all yours," said the cheerful one, comfortingly, "and you have a good right and title to it. It's been a hard day for you. Is the arm hurting like sin?"

"No; not more than it has to. But something else is. Listen, Bromley." And he briefed the story of the hollow-tooth promontory for the assistant.

"Great ghosts!—worse and more of it!" was Bromley's comment. Then he added: "I've seen a queer thing, too, Breckenridge: the colonel has moved out, vanished, taken to the hills."

"Out of Castle 'Cadia? You're mistaken. There is absolutely nothing doing at the big house: I've been reconnoitring with the glass."

"No, I didn't mean that," was the qualifying rejoinder. "I mean the ranch outfit down in the Park. It's gone. You know the best grazing at this time of the year is along the river: well, you won't find hair, hoof or horn of the colonel's cattle anywhere in the bottom lands—not a sign of them. Also, the ranch itself is deserted and the corrals are all open."

The harassed scowl would have taken on other added lines if there had been room for them.

"What do you make of it, Loudon?—what does it mean?"

"You can search me," was the puzzled reply. "But while you're doing it, you can bet high that it means something. To a man up a tall tree it looks as if the colonel were expecting a flood. Why should he expect it? What does he know?—more than we know?"

"It's another of the cursed mysteries," Ballard broke out in sullen anger. "It's enough to jar a man's sanity!"

"Mine was screwed a good bit off its base a long time ago," Bromley confessed. Then he came back to the present and its threatenings: "I'd give a month's pay if we had this crazy city crowd off of our hands and out of the Park."

"We'll get rid of it pretty early. I've settled that with Mr. Pelham. To get his people back to Denver by breakfast-time to-morrow, the trains will have to leave here between eight and eight-thirty."

"That is good news—as far as it goes. Will you tell Mr. Pelham about the rotten tooth—to-night, I mean?"

"I certainly shall," was the positive rejoinder; and an hour later, when the evening luncheon in

the big mess-tent had been served, and the crowd was gathered on the camp mesa to wait for the fireworks, Ballard got the president into the bungalow office, shut the door on possible interruptions, and laid bare the discouraging facts.

Singularly enough, as he thought, the facts seemed to make little impression upon the head of Arcadia Irrigation. Mr. Pelham sat back in Macpherson's home-made easy-chair, relighted his cigar, and refused to be disturbed or greatly interested. Assuming that he had not made the new involvement plain enough, Ballard went over the situation again.

"Another quarter of a million will be needed," he summed up, "and we shouldn't lose a single day in beginning. As I have said, there seems to be considerable seepage through the hill already, with less than half of the working head of water behind the dam. What it will be under a full head, no man can say."

"Oh, I don't know," said the president, easily. "A new boat always leaks a little. The cracks, if there are any, will probably silt up in a few days —or weeks."

"That is a possibility," granted the engineer; "but it is scarcely one upon which we have a right to depend. From what the secretary of the company said in his speech to-day, I gathered that the

lands under the lower line of the ditch will be put upon the market immediately; that settlers may begin to locate and purchase at once. That must not be done, Mr. Pelham."

"Why not?"

"Because any man who would buy and build in the bottom lands before we have filled that hollow tooth would take his life in his hands."

The president's smile was blandly genial.

"You've been having a pretty strenuous day of it, Mr. Ballard, and I can make allowances. Things will look brighter after you have had a good night's rest. And how about that arm? I didn't quite understand how you came to hurt it. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"The arm is all right," said Ballard, brusquely. Mr. Pelham's effort to change the subject was too crude and it roused a spirit of bulldog tenacity in the younger man. "You will pardon me if I go back to the original question. What are we going to do about that undermined hill?"

The president rose and dusted the cigar-ash from his coat-sleeve.

"Just at present, Mr. Ballard, we shall do nothing. To-morrow morning you may put your entire force on the ditch work, discharging the various camps as soon as the work is done. Let the 'hollow tooth' rest for the time. If a mistake

has been made, it's not your mistake—or Mr. Bromley's. And a word in your ear: Not a syllable of your very natural anxiety to any one, if you please. It can do no good; and it might do a great deal of harm. I shouldn't mention it even to Bromley, if I were you."

"Not mention it?—to Bromley? But Bromley knows; and we agree fully——"

"Well, see to it that he doesn't talk. And now I must really beg to be excused, Mr. Ballard. My duties as host——"

Ballard let him go, with a feeling of repulsive disgust that was almost a shudder, and sat for a brooding hour in silence while the fireworks sputtered and blazed from the platform on the mesa's edge and the full moon rose to peer over the background range, paling the reds and yellows of the rockets and bombs. He was still sitting where the president had left him when Bromley came in to announce the close of the *fête champêtre*.

"It's all over but the shouting, and they are taking to the Pullmans. You don't care to go to the foot of the pass with one of the trains, do you?"

"Not if you'll go. One of us ought to stay by the dam while the lake is filling, and I'm the one."

"Of course you are," said Bromley, cheerfully. "I'll go with the first section; I'm good for that much more, I guess; and I can come back from

Ackerman's ranch in the morning on one of the returning engines." Then he asked the question for which Ballard was waiting: "How did Mr. Pelham take the new grief?"

"He took it too easily; a great deal too easily, Loudon. I tell you, there's something rotten in Denmark. He was as cold-blooded as a fish."

Hoskins, long since reinstated, and now engineman of the first section of the excursion train, was whistling for orders, and Bromley had to go.

"I've heard a thing or two myself, during the day," he averred. "I'll tell you about them in the morning. The company's secretary has been busy making stock transfers all day—when he wasn't spellbinding from some platform or other. There is something doing—something that the baa-lambs don't suspect. And Mr. Pelham and his little inside ring are doing it."

Ballard got up and went to the door with the assistant.

"And that isn't the worst of it, Loudon," he said, with an air of sudden and vehement conviction. "This isn't an irrigation scheme at all, it's a stock deal from beginning to end. Mr. Pelham knows about that hollow tooth; he knew about it before I told him. You mark my words: we'll never get orders to plug that tunnel!"

Bromley nodded agreement. "I've been work-

ing my way around to that, too. All right; so let it be. My resignation goes in to-morrow morning, and I take it yours will?"

"It will, for a fact; I've been half sorry I didn't saw it off short with Mr. Pelham when I had him here. Good-night. Don't let them persuade you to go over the pass. Stop at Ackerman's, and get what sleep you can."

Bromley promised; and a little later, Ballard, sitting in the moonlight on the office porch, heard the trains pull out of the yard and saw the twinkling red eyes of the tail-lights vanish among the rounded hills.

"Good-by, Mr. Howard Pelham. I shouldn't be shocked speechless if you never came back to Arcadia," he muttered, apostrophising the departing president of Arcadia Irrigation. Then he put away the business entanglement and let his gaze wander in the opposite direction; toward the great house in the upper valley.

At the first eastward glance he sprang up with an exclamation of astonishment. The old king's palace was looming vast in the moonlight, with a broad sea of silver to take the place of the brown valley level in the bridging of the middle distance. But the curious thing was the lights, unmistakable electrics, as aforetime, twinkling through the tree-crownings of the knoll.

The Kentuckian left the porch and went to the edge of the mesa cliff to look down upon the flood, rising now by imperceptible gradations as the enlarging area of the reservoir lake demanded more water. The lapping tide was fully half way up the back wall of the dam, which meant that the colonel's power plant at the mouth of the upper canyon must be submerged past using. Yet the lights were on at Castle 'Cadia.

While he was speculating over this new mystery, the head-lamps of an automobile came in sight on the roundabout road below the dam, and presently a huge tonneau car, well filled, rolled noiselessly over the plank bridge and pointed its goblin eyes up the incline leading to the camp mesa. When it came to a stand at the cliff's edge, Ballard saw that it held Mrs. Van Bryck, Bigelow, and one of the Cantrell girls in the tonneau; and that Elsa was sharing the driving-seat with young Blacklock.

"Good evening, Mr. Ballard," said a voice from the shared half of the driving-seat. And then: "We are trying out the new car—isn't it a beauty? —and we decided to make a neighbourly call. Aren't you delighted to see us? Please say you are, anyway. It is the least you can do."

XXII

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

THE little French office clock—Bromley's testimonial from his enthusiastic and admiring classmates of the *École Polytechnique*—had chimed the hour of ten; the August moon rose high in a firmament of infinite depths above the deserted bunk shanties and the silent machinery on the camp mesa; the big touring car, long since cooled from its racing climb over the hills of the roundabout road, cast a grotesque and foreshortened shadow like that of a dwarfed bandwagon on the stone-chip whiteness of the cutting yard; and still the members of the auto party lingered on the porch of the adobe bungalow.

For Ballard, though he was playing the part of the unprepared host, the prolonged stay of the Castle-'Cadians was an unalloyed joy. When he had established Mrs. Van Bryck in the big easy-chair, reminiscent of Engineer Macpherson and his canny skill with carpenter's tools, and had dragged out the blanket-covered divan for Miss

Cantrell and Bigelow, he was free. And freedom, at that moment, meant the privilege of sitting a little apart on the porch step with Elsa Craigmiles.

For the first time in weeks the Kentuckian was able to invite his soul and to think and speak in terms of comfortable unembarrassment. The long strain of the industrial battle was off, and Mr. Pelham's triumphal beating of drums had been accomplished without loss of life, and with no more serious consequences than a lamed arm for the man who was best able to keep his own counsel. Having definitely determined to send in his resignation in the morning, and thus to avoid any possible entanglement which might arise when the instability of the great dam's foundations should become generally known, the burden of responsibility was immeasurably lightened. And to cap the ecstatic climax in its sentimental part, Elsa's mood was not mocking; it was sympathetic to a heart-mellowing degree.

One thing only sounded a jarring note in the soothing theme. That was young Blacklock's very palpable anxiety and restlessness. When the collegian had placed the big car, and had stopped its motor and extinguished its lights, he had betaken himself to the desert of stone chips, rambling therein aimlessly, but never, as Ballard observed, wandering out of eye-reach of the great

gray wall of masonry, of the growing lake in the crooking elbow of the canyon, and the path-girted hillside of the opposite shore. Blacklock's too ostentatious time-killing was the latest of the small mysteries; and when the Kentuckian came to earth long enough to remark it, he fancied that Jerry was waiting for a cue of some kind—waiting and quite obviously watching.

It was some time after Mrs. Van Bryck, plaintively protesting against being kept out so late, had begun to doze in her chair, and Bigelow had fetched wraps from the car wherewith to cloak a shuddery Miss Cantrell, that Ballard's companion said, guardedly: "Don't you think it would be in the nature of a charity to these two behind us if we were to share Jerry's wanderings for a while?"

"I'm not sharing with Jerry—or any other man—just now," Ballard objected. None the less, he rose and strolled with her across the stone yard; and at the foot of the great derrick he pulled out one of the cutter's benches for a seat. "This is better than the porch step," he was saying, when Blacklock got up from behind a rejected thoroughstone a few yards away and called to him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Ballard: I've got a corking big rattler under this rock. Bring a stick, if you can find one."

Ballard found a stick and went to the help of the snake-catcher.

"Don't give him a chance at you, Jerry," he warned. "Where is he?"

The collegian drew him around to the farther side of the great thorough-block.

"It was only a leg-pull," was the low-toned explanation. "I've been trying all evening to get a word with you, and I had to invent the snake. Wingfield says we're all off wrong on the mystery chase—'way off. You're to watch the dam—that's what he told me to tell you; watch it close till he comes down here from Castle 'Cadia."

"Watch the dam?" queried the engineer. "What am I to look for?"

"I don't know another blessed thing about it. But there's something doing; something bigger than—'sh! Miss Elsa's asking about the snake. Cut it out—cut it all out!"

"It was a false alarm," Ballard explained, when he rejoined his companion at the derrick's foot. "Jerry has an aggravated attack of imagination-itis. You were saying——?"

"I wasn't saying anything; but I shall begin now—if you'll sit down. You must be dying to know why we came down here to-night, of all the nights that ever were; and why we are staying so long past our welcome."

"I never felt less like dying since the world began; and you couldn't outstay your welcome if you should try," he answered, out of a full heart. "My opportunities to sit quietly in blissful nearness to you haven't been so frequent that I can afford to spoil this one with foolish queryings about the whys and wherefores."

"Hush!" she broke in imperatively. "You are saying light things again in the very thick of the miseries! Have you forgotten that to-day—a few hours ago—another attempt was made upon your life?"

"No; I haven't forgotten," he admitted.

"Be honest with me," she insisted. "You are not as indifferent as you would like to have me believe. Do you know who made the attempt?"

"Yes." He answered without realising that the single word levelled all the carefully raised barriers of concealment; and when the realisation came, he could have bitten his tongue for its incautious slip.

"Then you doubtless know who is responsible for all the terrible happenings; the—the *crimes?*"

Denial was useless now, and he said "Yes," again.

"How long have you known this?"

"I have suspected it almost from the first."

She turned upon him like some wild creature at bay.

"Why are you waiting? Why haven't you had him arrested and tried and condemned, like any other common murderer?"

He regarded her gravely, as the hard, white moonlight permitted. No man ever plumbs a woman's heart in its ultimate depths; least of all the heart of the woman he knows best and loves most.

"You seem to overlook the fact that I am his daughter's lover," he said, as if the simple fact settled the matter beyond question.

"And you have never sought for an explanation?—beyond the one which would stamp him as the vilest, the most inhuman of criminals?" she went on, ignoring his reason for condoning the crimes.

"I have; though quite without success, I think —until to-day."

"But to-day?" she questioned, anxiously, eagerly.

He hesitated, picking and choosing among the words. And in the end he merely begged her to help him. "To-day, hope led me over into the valley of a great shadow. Tell me, Elsa, dear: is your father always fully accountable for his actions?"

Her hands were tightly clasped in her lap, and there were tense lines of suffering about the sweet mouth.

"You have guessed the secret—my secret," she said, with the heart-break in her tone. And then: "Oh, you don't know, you can't imagine, what terrible agonies I have endured: and alone, always alone!"

"Tell me," he commanded lovingly. "I have a good right to know."

"The best right of all: the right of a patient and loving friend." She stopped, and then went on in the monotone of despair: "It is in the blood—a dreadful heritage. Do you—do you know how your father died, Breckenridge?"

"Not circumstantially; in an illness, I have been told. I was too young to know anything more than I was told; too young to feel the loss. Did some one tell me it was a fever?"

"It was not a fever," she said sorrowfully. "He was poisoned—by a horrible mistake. My father and his brother Abner were practising physicians in Lexington, your old home and ours; both of them young, ardent and enthusiastic in their profession. Uncle Abner was called to prescribe for your father—his life-long friend—in a trivial sickness. By some frightful mistake, the wrong drug was given and your father died.

Poor Uncle Abner paid for it with his reason, and, a few months later, with his own life. And a little while after his brother's death in the asylum, Father threw up his practice and his profession, and came here to bury himself in Arcadia."

The Kentuckian remembered Colonel Craigmiles's sudden seizure at his first sight of the dead Ballard's son, and saw the pointing of it. Nevertheless, he said, soberly: "That proves nothing, you know."

"Nothing of itself, perhaps. But it explains all the fearful things I have seen with my own eyes. Two years ago, after the trouble with Mr. Braithwaite, father seemed to change. He became bitterly vindictive against the Arcadia Company, and at times seemed to put his whole soul into the fight against it. Then the accidents began to happen, and—oh, I can't tell you the dreadful things I have seen, or the more dreadful ones I have suspected! I have watched him—followed him—when he did not suspect it. After dinner, the night you arrived, he left us all on the portico at Castle 'Cadia, telling me that he was obliged to come down here to the mine. Are you listening?"

"You needn't ask that: please go on."

"I thought it very strange; that he would let even a business errand take him away from us on

our first evening; and so I—I made an excuse to the others and followed him. Breckenridge, I saw him throw the stone from the top of that cliff—the stone that came so near killing you or Mr. Bromley, or both of you."

There had been a time when he would have tried to convince her that she must doubt the evidence of her own senses; but now it was too late: that milestone had been passed in the first broken sentence of her pitiful confession.

"There was no harm done, that time," he said, groping loyally for the available word of comforting.

"It was God's mercy," she asserted. "But listen again: that other night, when Mr. Bromley was hurt . . . After you had gone with the man who came for you, I hurried to find my father, meaning to ask him to send Otto in the little car to see if there was anything we could do. Aunt June said that father was lying down in the library: he was not there. I ran up-stairs. His coat and waistcoat were on the bed, and his mackintosh—the one he always wears when he goes out after sundown—was gone. After a little while he came in, hurriedly, secretly, and he would not believe me when I told him Mr. Bromley was hurt; he seemed to be sure it must be some one else. Then I knew. He had gone out to waylay you on your

walk back to the camp, and by some means had mistaken Mr. Bromley for you."

She was in the full flood-tide of the heart-broken confession now, and in sheer pity he tried to stop her.

"Let it all go," he counselled tenderly. "What is done, is done; and now that the work here is also done, there will be no more trouble for you."

"No; I must go on," she insisted. "Since others, who have no right to know, have found out, I must tell you."

"Others?" he queried.

"Yes: Mr. Wingfield, for one. Unlike you, he has not tried to be charitable. He believes——"

"He doesn't love you as I do," Ballard interrupted quickly.

"He doesn't love me at all—that way; it's Dosia. Hadn't you suspected? That was why he joined Aunt Janet's party—to be with Dosia."

"Thus vanishes the final shadow: there is nothing to come between us now," he exulted; and his unhurt arm drew her close.

"Don't!" she shuddered, shrinking away from him. "That is the bitterest drop in the cup of misery. You refuse to think of the awful heritage I should bring you; but I think of it—day and night. When your telegram came from Boston to

Mr. Lassley at New York, I was going with the Lassleys—not to Norway, but to Paris, to try to persuade Doctor Perard, the great alienist, to come over and be our guest at Castle 'Cadia. It seemed to be the only remaining hope. But when you telegraphed your changed plans, I knew I couldn't go; I knew I must come home. And in spite of all, he has tried three times to kill you. You know he must be insane; tell me you know it," she pleaded.

"Since it lifts a burden too heavy to be borne, I am very willing to believe it," he rejoined gravely. "I understand quite fully now. And it makes no difference—between us, I mean. You must not let it make a difference. Let the past be past, and let us come back to the present. Where is your father now?"

"After dinner he went with Mr. Wingfield and Otto to the upper canyon. There is a breakwater at the canyon portal which they hoped might save the power-house and laboratory from being undermined by the river, and they were going to strengthen it with bags of sand. I was afraid of what might come afterward—that you might be here alone and unsuspecting. So I persuaded Cousin Janet and the others to make up the car-party."

From where they were sitting at the derrick's foot, the great boom leaned out like a giant's arm

uplifted above the canyon lake. With the moon sweeping toward the zenith, the shadow of the huge iron beam was clearly cut on the surface of the water. Ballard's eye had been mechanically marking the line of shadow and its changing position as the water level rose in the Elbow.

"The reservoir is filling a great deal faster than I supposed it would," he said, bearing his companion resolutely away from the painful things.

"There have been storms on the main range all day," was the reply. "Father has a series of electrical signal stations all along the upper canyon. He said at the dinner-table that the rise tonight promises to be greater than any we have ever seen."

Ballard came alive upon the professional side of him with a sudden quickening of the workaday faculties. With the utmost confidence in that part of the great retaining-wall for which he was personally responsible—the superstructure—he had still been hoping that the huge reservoir lake would fill normally; that the dam would not be called upon to take its enormous stresses like an engine starting under a full load. It was for this reason that he had been glad to time the closing of the spillway in August, when the flow of the river was at its minimum. But fate, the persistent ill-fortune which had dogged the Arcadian enter-

prise from the beginning, seemed to be gathering its forces for a final blow.

"Cloud-bursts?" he questioned. "Are they frequent in the head basin of the Boiling Water?"

"Not frequent, but very terrible when they do occur. I have seen the Elbow toss its spray to the top of this cliff—once, when I was quite small; and on that day the lower part of our valley was, for a few hours, a vast flood lake."

"Was that before or after the opening of your father's mine over yonder?" queried Ballard.

"It was after. I suppose the mine was flooded, and I remember there was no work done in it for a long time. When it was reopened, a few years ago, father had that immense bulkhead and heavy, water-tight door put in to guard against another possible flood."

Ballard made the sign of comprehension. Here was one of the mysteries very naturally accounted for. The bulkhead and iron-bound door of the zirconium mine were, indeed, fortifications; but the enemy to be repulsed was nature—not man.

"And the electric signal service system in the upper canyon is a part of the defence for the mine?" he predicated.

"Yes. It has served on two or three occasions to give timely warning so that the miners could come up and seal the door in the bulkhead. But

it has been a long time since a cloud-burst flood has risen high enough in the Elbow to threaten the mine."

Silence supervened; the silence of the flooding moonlight, the stark hills and the gently lapping waters. Ballard's brain was busy with the newly developed responsibilities. There was a little space for action, but what could be done? In all probability the newly completed dam was about to be subjected to the supreme test, violently and suddenly applied. The alternative was to open the spillway gate, using the cut-off tunnel as a sort of safety-valve when the coming flood water should reach the Elbow.

But there were an objection and an obstacle. Now that he knew the condition of the honeycombed tunnel, Ballard hesitated to make it the raceway for the tremendously augmented torrent. And for the obstacle there was a mechanical difficulty: with the weight of the deepening lake upon it, the stop-gate could be raised only by the power-screws; and the fires were out in the engine that must furnish the power.

The Kentuckian was afoot and alert when he said: "You know the probabilities better than any of us: how much time have we before these flood tides will come down?"

She had risen to stand with him, steadying her-

self by the hook of the derrick-fall. "I don't know," she began; and at that instant a great slice of the zirconium mine dump slid off and settled into the eddying depths with a splash.

"It is nothing but a few more cubic yards of the waste," he said, when she started and caught her breath with a little gasp.

"Not that—but the door!" she faltered, pointing across the chasm. "It was shut when we came out here—I am positive!"

The heavy, iron-studded door in the bulkhead was open now, at all events, as they could both plainly see; and presently she went on in a frightened whisper: "Look! there is something moving—this side of the door—among the loose timbers!"

The moving object defined itself clearly in the next half-minute; for the two at the derrick-heel, and for another—young Blacklock, who was crouching behind his rejected thorough-stone directly opposite the mine entrance. It took shape as the figure of a man, slouch-hatted and muffled in a long coat, creeping on hands and knees toward the farther dam-head; creeping by inches and dragging what appeared to be a six-foot length of iron pipe. The king's daughter spoke again, and this time her whisper was full of sharp agony.

"*Breckenridge!* it is my father—just as I have seen him before! That thing he is dragging after

him: isn't it a—merciful Heaven! he is going to blow up the dam! Oh, for pity's sake can't you think of some way to stop him?"

There are crises when the mind, acting like a piece of automatic machinery, flies from suggestion to conclusion with such facile rapidity that all the intermediate steps are slurred and effaced. Ballard marked the inching advance, realised its object and saw that he would not have time to intervene by crossing the dam, all in the same instant. Another click of the mental mechanism and the alternative suggested itself, was grasped, weighed, accepted and transmuted into action.

It was a gymnast's trick, neatly done. The looped-up derrick-fall was a double wire cable, running through a heavy iron sheave which carried the hook and grappling chains. Released from its rope lashings at the mast-heel, it would swing out and across the canyon like a monster pendulum. Ballard forgot his bandaged arm when he laid hold of the sheave-hook and slashed at the yarn seizings with his pocket-knife; was still oblivious to it when the released pendulum surged free and swept him out over the chasm.

XXIII

DEEP UNTO DEEP

MECHANICALLY as such things are done, Ballard remembered afterward that he was keenly alive to all that was passing. He heard Elsa's half-stifled cry of horror, Blacklock's shout of encouragement from some point higher up on the mesa, and mingled with these the quick *pad-pad* of footfalls as of men running. In mid-air he had a glimpse of the running men; two of them racing down the canyon on the side toward which his swinging bridge was projecting him. Then the derrick-fall swept him on, reached the extreme of its arc, and at the reversing pause he dropped, all fingers to clutch and tensely strung muscles to hold, fairly upon the crouching man in the muffling rain-coat.

For Blacklock, charging in upon the battle-field by way of the dam, the happenings of the next half-minute resolved themselves into a fierce hand-to-hand struggle between the two men for the possession of the piece of iron pipe. At the

pendulum-swinging instant, the collegian had seen the sputtering flare of a match in the dynamiter's hands; and in the dash across the dam he had a whiff of burning gunpowder.

When the two rose up out of the dust of the grapple, Ballard was the victor. He had wrested the ignited pipe-bomb from his antagonist, and turning quickly he hurled it in a mighty javelin-cast far up the Elbow. There was a splash, a smothered explosion, and a geyser-like column of water shot up from the plunging-point, spouting high to fall in sheets of silver spray upon the two upcoming runners who were alertly springing from foothold to foothold across the dissolving mine dump.

So much young Blacklock noted at the moment of uprushing. In the next breath he had wrapped the mackintoshed bomb-firer in a wrestler's hug from behind, and the knife raised to be driven into Ballard's back clattered upon the stones of the path. There was a gasping oath in a strange tongue, a fierce struggle on the part of the garroted one to turn and face his new assailant, and then the collegian, with his chin burrowing between the shoulder-blades of his man, heard swift footsteps approaching and a deep-toned, musical voice booming out a sharp command: "Manuel! you grand scoundrel!—drop that thah gun, suh!"

Something else, also metallic, and weightier than the knife, clicked upon the stones; whereupon Blacklock loosed his strangler's grip and stepped back. Ballard stooped to pick up the knife and the pistol. Wingfield, who had been the colonel's second in the race along the hazardous mine path, drew aside; and master and man were left facing each other.

The Mexican straightened up and folded his arms. He was breathing hard from the effect of Blacklock's gripping hug, but his dark face was as impassive as an Indian's. The white-haired King of Arcadia turned to Ballard, and the mellow voice broke a little.

"Mistuh-uh Ballard, you, suh, are a Kentuckian, of a race that knows to the fullest extent the meaning of henchman loyalty. You shall say what is to be done with this po' villain of mine. By his own confession, made to me this afte'noon, he is a cutthroat and an assassin. Undeh a mistaken idea of loyalty to me"—the deep voice grew more tremulous at this—"undeh a mistaken idea of loyalty to me, suh, he has been fighting in his own peculiah fashion what he conceived to be my battle with the Arcadia Company. Without compunction, without remo'se, he has taken nearly a score of human lives since the day when he killed the man Braithwaite and flung his body into the

riveh. Am I making it cleah to you, Mistuh Ballard?"

How he managed to convey his sense of entire comprehension, Ballard scarcely knew. One thought was submerging all others under a mounting wave of triumphant joy: Colonel Adam, the father of the princess of heart's delight, was neither a devil in human guise nor a homicidal madman. Elsa's trouble was a phantom appeased; it had vanished like the dew on a summer morning.

"I thank you, suh," was the courtly acknowledgment; and then the deep voice continued, with an added note of emotion. "I am not pleading for the murderer, but for my po' liegeman who knew no law of God or man higheh than what he mistakenly took to be his masteh's desiah. How long all this would have continued, if I hadn't suhprised him in the ve'y act of trying to kill you as you were lowering that thah stop-gate to-day, we shall neveh know. But the entiah matteh lies heavy on my conscience, suh. I ought to have suspected the true sou'ce of all the mysterious tragedies long ago; I should have suspected it if I hadn't been chin-deep myself, suh, in a similah pool of animosity against Mr. Pelham and his fellow-robbehs. What will you do with this po' scoundrel of mine, Mistuh Ballard?"

"Nothing, at present," said Ballard, gravely,

"or nothing more than to ask him a question or two." He turned upon the Mexican, who was still standing statue-like with his back to the low cliff of the path ledge. "Did you kill Macpherson?—as well as Braithwaite and Sanderson?"

"I kill-a dem all," was the cool reply. "You say—he all say—'I make-a da dam.' I'll say: '*Caramba!* You *no* make-a da dam w'at da Colonel no want for you to make.' Dass all."

"So it was you who hit Bromley on the head and knocked him into the canyon?"

The statuesque foreman showed his teeth. "Dat was one bad *mees*take. I'll been try for knock *you* on da haid, dat time, for sure, Señor Ballar'."

"And you were wearing that rain-coat when you did it?"

The Mexican nodded. "I'll wear heem h-always w'en da sun gone down—same like-a da Colonel."

"Also, you were wearing it that other night, when you heaved a stone down on my office roof?"

Another nod.

"But on the night when you scared Hoskins and made him double up his train on Dead Man's Curve, you didn't wear it; you wore a shooting-coat and a cap like the one Braithwaite used to wear."

The posing statue laughed hardily. "Dat was one—w'at you call heem?—one beeg joke. I'll been like to make dat 'Oskins break hees h'own neck, *si:* hees talk too much 'bout da man w'at drown' heself."

"And the Carson business: you were mixed up in that, too?"

"Dat was one *mees*take, al-so; one ver' beeg *mees*take. I'll hire dat dam'-fool Carson to shoot da ditch. I t'ink you and da beeg h-Irishman take-a da trail and Carson keel you. Carson, he'll take-a da money, and make for leetle scheme to steal cattle. Som' day I keel heem for dat."

"Not in this world," cut in Ballard, briefly. "You're out of the game, from this on." And then, determined to be at the bottom of the final mystery: "You played the spy on Mr. Wingfield, Bromley, Blacklock and me one afternoon when we were talking about these deviltries. Afterward, you went up to Castle 'Cadia. That evening Mr. Wingfield nearly lost his life. Did you have a hand in that?"

Again the Mexican laughed. "Señor Wingfiel' he is know too moch. Som' day he is make me ver' sorry for myself. So I'll hide be'ind dat fornace, and give heem one leetle push, so"—with the appropriate gesture.

"That is all," said Ballard, curtly. And then

to the colonel: "I think we'd better be moving over to the other side. The ladies will be anxious. Jerry, take that fellow on ahead of you, and see that he doesn't get away. I'm sorry for you, Colonel Craigmiles; and that is no empty form of words. As you have said, I am a Kentuckian, and I do know what loyalty—even mistaken loyalty—is worth. My own grudge is nothing; I haven't any. But there are other lives to answer for. Am I right?"

"You are quite right, suh; quite right," was the sober rejoinder; and then Blacklock said "*Vamos!*" to his prisoner, airing his one word of Spanish, and in single file the five men crossed on the dam to the mesa side of the rising lake where Bigelow, with Elsa and Miss Cantrell and a lately awakened Mrs. Van Bryck, were waiting. At the reassembling, Ballard cut the colonel's daughter out of the storm of eager questionings swiftly, masterfully.

"You were wrong—we were all wrong," he whispered joyously. "The man whom you saw, the man who has done it all in your father's absolute and utter ignorance of what was going on, is Manuel. He has confessed; first to his master, and just now to all of us. Your father is as sane as he is blameless. There is no obstacle now for either of us. I shall resign to-morrow morning, and——"

It was the colonel's call that interrupted.

"One moment, Mistuh Ballard, if you please, suh. Are there any of youh ditch camps at present in the riveh valley below heah?"

Ballard shook his head. "Not now; they are all on the high land." Then, remembering Bromley's report of the empty ranch headquarters and corrals: "You think there is danger?"

"I don't think, suh: I *know*. Look thah," waving an arm toward the dissolving mine dump on the opposing slope; "when the wateh reaches that tunnel and finds its way behind the bulkhead, Mistuh Ballard, youh dam's gone—doomed as surely as that sinful world that wouldn't listen to Preachuh Noah!"

"But, Colonel—you can't know positively!"

"I do, suh. And Mistuh Pelham knows quite as well as I do. You may have noticed that we have no pumping machinery oveh yondeh, Mistuh Ballard: *That is because the mine drains out into youh pot-hole below the dam!*"

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated Ballard, aghast at the possibilities laid bare in this single explanatory sentence. "And you say that Mr. Pelham knows this?"

"He has known it all along. I deemed it my neighbo'ly duty to inform him when we opened the lower level in the mine. But he won't be the

loseh; no, suh; not Mistuh Howard Pelham. It'll be those po' sheep that he brought up here to-day to prepare them for the shearing—if the riveh gives him time to make the turn."

"The danger is immediate, then?" said Bigelow.

The white-haired King of Arcadia was standing on the brink of the mesa cliff, a stark figure in the white moonlight, with his hand at his ear. "Hark, gentlemen!" he commanded; and then: "Youh ears are all youngeh than mine. What do you heah?"

It was Ballard who replied: "The wind is rising on the range; I can hear it singing in the pines."

"No, suh; that isn't the wind—it's wateh; torrents and oceans of it. There have been great and phenomenal storms up in the basin all day; storms and cloud-bursts. See thah!"

A rippling wave a foot high came sweeping down the glassy surface of the reservoir lake, crowding and rioting until it doubled its depth in rushing into the foothill canyon. Passing the mine, it swept away other tons of the dump; and an instant later the water at the feet of the onlookers lifted like the heave of a great ground-swell—lifted, but did not subside.

Ballard's square jaw was out-thrust. "We did

not build for any such brutal tests as this," he muttered. "Another surge like that——"

"It is coming!" cried Elsa. "The power dam in the upper canyon is gone!" and the sharer of the single Cantrell Christian name shrieked and took shelter under Bigelow's arm.

Far up the moon-silvered expanse of the lake a black line was advancing at railway speed. It was like the ominous flattening of the sea before a hurricane; but the chief terror of it lay in the peaceful surroundings. No cloud flecked the sky; no breath of air was stirring; the calm of the matchless summer night was unbroken, save by the surf-like murmur of the great wave as it rose high and still higher in the narrowing raceway. Instinctively Ballard put his arm about Elsa and drew her back from the cliff's edge. There could be no chance of danger for the group looking on from the top of the high mesa; yet the commanding roar of the menace was irresistible.

When the wave entered the wedge-shaped upper end of the Elbow it was a foam-crested wall ten feet high, advancing with the black-arched front of a tidal billow, mighty, terrifying, the cold breath of it blowing like a chill wind from the underworld upon the group of watchers. In its onrush the remains of the mine dump melted and vanished, and the heavy bulkhead timbering at the mouth of

the workings was torn away, to be hurled, with other tons of floating débris, against the back-wall of the dam.

Knowing all the conditions, Ballard thought the masonry would never withstand the hammer-blow impact of the wreck-laden billow. Yet it stood, apparently undamaged, even after the splintered mass of wreckage, tossed high on the crest of the wave, had leaped the coping course to plunge thundering into the ravine below. The great wall was like some massive fortification reared to endure such shocks; and Elsa, facing the terrific spectacle beside her lover, like a reincarnation of one of the battle-maidens, gave him his rightful meed of praise.

"You builded well—you and the others!" she cried. "It will not break!"

But even as she spoke, the forces that sap and destroy were at work. There was a hoarse groaning from the underground caverns of the zirconium mine—sounds as of a volcano in travail. The wave retreated for a little space, and the white line of the coping showed bare and unbroken in the moonlight. Silence, the deafening silence which follows the thunderclap, succeeded to the clamour of the waters, and this in turn gave place to a curious gurgling roar as of some gigantic vessel emptying itself through an orifice in its bottom.

The white-haired king was nearest to the brink of peril. At the gurgling roar he turned with arms outspread and swept the onlooking group, augmented now by the men from Garou's cook camp, back and away from the dam-head. Out of the torrent-worn pit in the lower ravine a great jet of water was spurting intermittently, like the blood from a severed artery.

"That is the end!" groaned Ballard, turning away from the death grapple between his work and the blind giant of the Boiling Water; and just then Blacklock shouted, snatched, wrestled for an instant with a writhing captive—and was left with a torn mackintosh in his hands for his only trophy.

They all saw the Mexican when he slipped out of the rain-coat, eluded Blacklock, and broke away, to dart across the chasm on the white pathway of the dam's coping course. He was half-way over to the shore of escape when his nerve failed. To the spouting fountain in the gulch below and the sucking whirlpool in the Elbow above was added a second tidal wave from the cloud-burst sources; a mere ripple compared with the first, but yet great enough to make a maelstrom of the gurgling whirlpool, and to send its crest of spray flying over the narrow causeway. When the barrier was bared again the Mexican was seen clinging limpet-like to the rocks, his cour-

age gone and his death-warrant signed. For while he clung, the great wall lost its perfect alignment, sagged, swayed outward under the irresistible pressure from above, crumbled, and was gone in a thunder-burst of sound that stunned the watchers and shook the solid earth of the mesa where they stood.

"Are you quite sure it wasn't all a frightful dream?" asked the young woman in a charming house gown and pointed Turkish slippers of the young man with his left arm in a sling; the pair waiting the breakfast call in the hammock-bridged corner of the great portico at Castle 'Cadia.

It was a Colorado mountain morning of the sort called "Italian" by enthusiastic tourists. The air was soft and balmy; a rare blue haze lay in the gulches; and the patches of yellowing aspens on the mountain shoulders added the needed touch of colour to relieve the dun-browns and grays of the balds and the heavy greens of the forested slopes. Save for the summer-dried grass, lodged and levelled in great swaths by the sudden freeing of the waters, the foreground of the scene was unchanged. Through the bowl-shaped valley the Boiling Water, once more an August-dwindled mountain stream, flowed murmurously as before; and a mile away in the foothill gap of the Elbow,

the huge steel-beamed derrick lined itself against the farther distances.

"No, it wasn't a dream," said Ballard. "The thirty-mile, nerve-trying drive home in the car, with the half-wrecked railroad bridge for a river crossing, ought to have convinced you of the realities."

"Nothing convinces me any more," she confessed, with the air of one who has seen chaos and cosmos succeed each other in dizzying alternations; and when Ballard would have gone into the particulars of that with her, the King of Arcadia came up from his morning walk around the homestead knoll.

"Ah, you youngstehs!" he said, with the note of fatherly indulgence in the mellow voice. "Out yondeh undeh the maples, I run across the Bigelow boy and Madge Cantrell;—'Looking to see what damage the water had done,' they said, as innocent as a pair of turtle-doves! Oveh in the orcha'd I stumble upon Mistuh Wingfield and Dosia. I didn't make them lie to me, and I'm not going to make you two. But I should greatly appreciate a word with you, Mistuh Ballard."

Elsa got up to go in, but Ballard sat in the hammock and drew her down beside him again. "With your permission, which I was going to ask immediately after breakfast, Colonel Craigmiles,

we two are one," he said, with the frank, boyish smile that even his critics found hard to resist. "Will you so regard us?"

The colonel's answering laugh had no hint of obstacles in it.

"It was merely a little matteh of business," he explained. "Will youh shot-up arm sanction a day's travel, Mistuh Ballard?"

"Surely. This sling is wholly Miss Elsa's idea and invention. I don't need it."

"Well, then; heah's the programme: Afteh breakfast, Otto will drive you oveh to Alta Vista in the light car. From there you will take the train to Denver. When you arrive, you will find the tree of the Arcadia Company pretty well shaken by the news of the catastrophe to the dam. Am I safe in assuming so much?"

"More than safe: every stockholder in the outfit will be ducking to cover."

"Ve'y good. Quietly, then, and without much —ah—ostentation, as youh own good sense would dictate, you will pick up, in youh name or mine, a safe majority of the stock. Do I make myself cleah?"

"Perfectly, so far."

"Then you will come back to Arcadia, reorganise youh force—you and Mistuh Bromley—and build you anotheh dam; this time in the location

below the Elbow, where it should have been built befo'. Am I still cleah?"

"Why, clear enough, certainly. But I thought —I've been given to understand that you were fighting the irrigation scheme on its merits; that you didn't want your kingdom of Arcadia turned into a farming community. I don't blame you, you know."

The old cattle king's gaze went afar, through the gap to the foothills and beyond to the billowing grass-lands of Arcadia Park, and the shrewd old eyes lost something of their militant fire when he said:

"I reckon I was right selfish about that, in the beginning, Mistuh Ballard. It's a mighty fine range, suh, and I was greedy for the isolation—as some otheh men are greedy for money and the power it brings. But this heah little girl of mine she went out into the world, and came back to shame me, suh. Here was land and a living, independence and happiness, for hundreds of the world's po' strugglers, and I was making a cattle paschuh of it! Right then and thah was bo'n the idea, suh, of making a sure-enough kingdom of Arcadia, and it was my laying of the foundations that attracted Mr. Pelham and his money-hungry crowd."

"Your idea!" ejaculated Ballard. "Then Pelham and his people were interlopers?"

"You can put it that way; yes, suh. Thei-uh idea was wrapped up in a coin-sack; you could fai'ly heah it clink! Thei-uh proposal was to sell the land, and to make the water an eve'lasting tax upon it; mine was to make the water free. We hitched on that, and then they proposed to *me*—to *me*, suh—to make a stock-selling swindle of it. When I told them they were a pack of damned scoundrels, they elected to fight me, suh; and last night, please God, we saw the beginning of the end that is to be—the righteous end. But come on in to breakfast; you can't live on sentiment for always, Mistuh Ballard."

They went in together behind him, the two for whom Arcadia had suddenly been transformed into paradise, and on the way the Elsa whom Ballard had first known and learned to love in the far-distant world beyond the barrier mountains reasserted herself.

"What do you suppose Mr. Pelham will say when he hears that you have really made love to the cow-punching princess?" she asked, flippantly. "Do you usually boast of such things in advance, Mr. Ballard?"

But his answer ignored the little pin-prick of mockery.

"I'm thinking altogether of Colonel Adam Craigmiles, my dear; and of the honour he does

you by being your father. He is a king, every inch of him, Elsa, girl! I'm telling you right now that we'll have to put in the high speed, and keep it in, to live up to him."

And afterward, when the house-party guests had gathered, in good old Kentucky fashion, around the early breakfast-table, and the story of the night had been threshed out, and word was brought that Otto and the car were waiting, he stood up with his hand on the back of Elsa's chair and lifted his claret class with the loyal thought still uppermost. "A toast with me, good friends—my stirrup-cup: I drink to our host, the Knight Commander of Castle 'Cadia, and the reigning monarch of the Land of Heart's Delight—Long live the King of Arcadia!"

And they drank it standing.

THE END

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